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The Golden Pilgrimage

By the Same Author

THE ORIENTAL CARAVAN
(2nd Impression)

LIFE OF MOHAMED

THE PRINCE AGHA KHAN

TRAGEDY OF AMANULLAH

ISLAMIC SUFISM

The Golden Pilgrimage

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By
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Starling at Allah's Dawn

The little wind which heralds the sun's rising stirred among the sands. A loud call resounded through the caravan sarai, the cry of the Muezzin calling to men to awake so that they might engage in morning prayer.

"La Ellaha Illallah (There is no God but One God)," he repeated. "Worship is better than sleep!" he continued in his holy chant.

In the red rays of the first hour of day our devotions were hastily offered, for we had far to go before the Imam gave the signal for journey's end that day.

As an over devout fellow-pilgrim of mine from Konia said, the uproar of the caravan getting underway is like that of Eblis flapping his wings. The peculiar ululation of the camels, the incessant yelping of dogs, the cries of the camel-drivers and water-sellers, urging travellers to see that they are well supplied with liquid refreshment, and the noisy farewells of friends combine to make a volume of sound such as few who are not used to travelling in odd corners of Asia can imagine. Mounting my camel, I ride some hundred yards or so out of the crowd so that I may see the picture in its entirety.

From this distance I receive a much better impression of the caravan as a whole than when in its midst. At first, it gives the impression of a dull-bright mass of colour in which the primary hues—reds, blues, greens—predominate, with here and there a splash of gamboge or snowy white. The several races which compose the personnel of the pilgrimage are easily discovered. There are the dreamy-eyed, visionary men of Turkestan, the stalwart soldierly Afghans, the placid Turks, the more volatile Egyptians, each pranked in the garb of his race.

The caravan forms up into a long line of colour. The time has not yet come to cast off bright garments for the white and grey of pilgrimage. As the sun climbs slowly upward it strikes on the garish pageant of our pious column, turning it into a flower-garden. The guards, mounted on horseback, and with rifle on knee, take their places at the

10 head of the procession. The caravan is ready to start: only the smouldering fires are left in the sarai.

But then there occurred the usual delay. The leader must be interviewed by a hundred anxious folk as he rides from end to end of the column. Many of these people come from districts the most unfrequented, and are unused to travel. They are out of their environment, and cannot understand conditions. Their questions are not put very clearly, or are, perhaps, couched in a language unknown to the leader.

Others pray incessantly, hoping that this will add merit to their pilgrimage. Again and again they repeat their prayers or verses from the holy literature. The clamour of their vociferation rises like the drone of myriads of bees; occasionally a voice, louder than the rest, rises above the hum.

Suddenly there is a roar from the front of the train. A pack-camel has run amok, has bitten the animal in front of it and kicked that in its rear. Uproar ensues. The owner of the beast is deluged with pious curses, and has much ado to drag it by the halter out of the column.

A rifle-shot rolls over the plain in a series of reverberating echoes. It is the signal for departure. We are off. But it is a slow progress at first. The camel is a beast which takes a long time to get under way. The digestion of his morning meal and the absorption of the large quantities of water he drinks before starting on a journey, occupy an unconscionable time, and until then he is apt to be surly and even wicked in temper. Those who know him best do not seek to chastise him, but to humour him, if possible —a difficult task. The rocking of the camel from side to side is like that of a boat on the sea, and occasionally has the same results.

The caravan, as seen by an outrider like myself, who kept clear of its flanks for some miles of its progress, has the appearance of a great coloured serpent as it winds, over the desert sands. It seems a rainbow fallen flat to earth and moving slowly across the plain, and which, having no wings to bear it back to heaven, must crawl

these sands until their golden dusts heap over it and bury it deeply—until some poet finds it and by his magic restores it to the skies. On, on it drags, under the now merciless sun, constant prayers arising from its straggling ranks.

In this brilliant column is packed all the romance and marvel of the East; it is the Arabian Nights in motion, an epitome of the wonder of the Orient. At night such tales are told around its camp-fires as a novelist would give years of his life to hear, tales told by artists who are yet amateurs, life-histories of adventure in every land of the East, adventure often so seemingly incredible that one not belonging to this wandering brotherhood would laugh aloud, could he follow its recital. But there is no laughter here. These bronze-faced listeners comprehend the nature of the artist's task, and know full well that few life-stories are worthy of the telling unless gilded by gorgeous words. And again, the incredible does happen in the East, is happening there every day.

All day the caravan trails its length along the golden plain, slowly, but with all the certainty of fate. At the hour of sunset it halts, the Muezzin is called and devotions are engaged in. Then the evening meal is prepared according to the strict regulations in vogue on pilgrimage and the several national customs of the pilgrims. The most extraordinary concoctions are made, the most extraordinary amount of water is consumed.

There is very little sleep to be had. All night long pious and perfervid men repeat their prayers or texts incessantly. The staying-power of some of these aged patriarchs is enormous. They appear to be made of hammered steel. Neither the fierce solar rays, the lack of good water, hunger, nor the want of sleep affects them in the slightest degree. They rise in the morning, straight as palm trees, fresh as palms in an oasis, with supplications on their bearded lips.

The caravan is the symbol of religious sacrifice. What inclusion in its ranks means to the devout cannot be stated in words. In many cases it implies a lifetime's hoarding and strenuous toil in order that he may behold the city of

his desire. And for a season he becomes again the nomadic patriarch who lies behind the history of his faith and fervour—the man who walks with Allah.

Thuswise we had started on our long, long trail on pilgrims' way: and, at the end of the day's journey, rested at another caravan sarai.

Although none formed groups or separate parties within the caravan as such—as all men are one in the eyes of Allah—nevertheless some of us threw our few worldly goods together as we rested at night: I was with a one-time professor and a wandering merchant.

"He is sleeping, if ever a man slept," said the copper merchant to me, nodding towards a placid-faced man in the shade of the balcony of the sarai.

"No, my brother-in-faith," said I to the corpulent merchant, "the professor is thuswise always. I have often thought that he indulged in deep day-dreams: but he merely meditates!"

"Leave alone, leave alone, the Sheikh of Sheikhs!" whispered our camel-driver; "such men better sleep, for they talk like books."

The three of us sat in a cell of that caravan sarai in Old Istamboul, where, in days gone by, much merchandise passed to the lands of the West. Carpets from Bokhara, spice from Ind, salt and vinegar from Trabezand and goodly loads of dried fruit from Azmar were brought thither by lumbering camels.

But now its glory had faded. New routes, newer methods of carrying goods were in vogue, and we three pilgrims were but five of the guests in the old sarai that night.

The man whose "trance" was the subject of our remarks was no other than Sheikh Ahmed Bey of Konia fame. He had written more books than he had read: and in the lore of the ancient East few equalled him.

Like me, a globe-trotter pilgrim, who sought nothing better from life but to bend his steps from shrine to shrine of Old Asia, from Holy Mecca, to Meshed Sharief, to Kerbella Moala, Bokhara Sharief and much further, the

Professor of Philosophy was a pilgrim—a pilgrim not only in the sense of performing the sacred rites at Mecca, but a seeker who sought more than a green turban as a reward for his Haj of the sacred shrines.

Withal, the Professor's thoughts about diverse matters were so remarkable; and the method and words which he chose to describe them so extraordinary, that to most men his speech was one long string of allegory.

The copper merchant, my other fellow-pilgrim, too, was somewhat of a philosopher: corpulent, with a healthy appetite, and taste in dress so elegant as to be inconsistent with his pilgrim-calling that I once remarked to him about it. He was passionately fond of a mantle of green silk which always lay at his bedside, and which afterwards I persuaded him to sell to me: but thereby hangs a tale.

This particular night, as we waited in those lingering hours that precede the dawn of a start on our long pilgrimage, by way of digression I suggested that the learned professor might relate his life adventures to us.

"My adventures, good friend," he said, "are not of those who climb the moon—but I shall tell you of a certain man of this city, and of his love for the Rose of Istamboul."

Here is his story:

The Rose of Istamboul

Seyd Effendi was a very happy young man because he knew the meaning of beauty; for when a man realizes the significance of beauty he cannot be otherwise than happy. He always wore a smile, a rather secret-seeming smile, which gave people to think he was frivolous. But, like all real worshippers of the divinity of loveliness, he was serious at heart as a man of sixty who knows that he is the only prop of a large family.

Seyd was but twenty-three, but already he had three wives. These had been thrust upon him by family and political exigencies. His first wife, Zara, was six years older than he, a cumbrous, over-sensible woman. Ayesha, the second, had been the young widow of a wealthy and childless pasha who had left her everything, and such a prize Seyd's mother could not resist for him. Danäe was a Greek, a prisoner in the last rebellion, given him by his General as a reward. He could not refuse her, and his native chivalry denied any other arrangement save marriage.

He had wished for none of these women, all three had been thrust upon him. They were content enough, but although he was kind, considerate and friendly with all three, he cared for none of them. He cared only for the beauty of the spiritual. He told himself that he should have been a Sufi, one of those poet-priests whose hermit lives are given over to the ecstasy of the contemplation of the divine.

But this evening, as he stepped to his barge through the most beautiful garden on the banks of the Golden Horn, Seyd realized that hermitage was really unnecessary to ecstatic thinking and living. Here was Paradise at his very gate. Through the white columns of the Byzantine ruins standing where the garden met the sea, glowed the island-bearing sapphire of the Bosphorus, a plane of light beneath a turquoise sky dashed with thin gold. The lineaments on the marble capitals were clear as in the sculptor's thought, and the stoney wreaths of ivy, myrtle and pine which clustered the shattered pillars seemed only not to move

18 and grow because no wind vexed the night's first rapture. It was good to live, not for vitality's sake, but for the sake of that essence of the seraphic which drenches the airs of that golden place.

The light barge, under the compelling hands of its four negro rowers, thrust its nose towards the jutting lands which almost meet at the bay's entrance. Seyd lit a chibouque, and lay back in the cushions, taking in the magic of the evening. A frail drift of opal cloud held the upper sky, and the stars through this gazed as women's eyes through veiling. Women's eyes! He smiled rather bitterly. To him there had always seemed more of devil than angel in womankind. They were not serene, they had no depths of mind or soul, they were prone to obsessions and gross superstitions which clung to them like weed to the body of a ship. They were spirits of impulse, hating and loving in a breath. Allah alone knew why He had created them. Foolish men were captured by their little coquetries, but wise men avoided the snare of them, as they avoided all that was not good for the soul's life.

The barge shot through the harbour's mouth, and continued its course round the coastal fringe of silver sand lying without the Horn. The heaped miracle of Istamboul rose behind him, a mountain of minarets and rainbow domes, lofting into the illimitable turquoise of the Eastern night. At the spectacle of it, beautiful as a wreck of Paradise, his eyes overflowed with tears. When Nature and Man set hands to the same canvas what, with the aid of Allah, could they not achieve?

The barge drew shoreward, and toward a small jetty. Seyd landed, and told the negroes to wait. He walked inland by a narrow path, plunging into a little wood where a small ruined mosque stood in deserted whiteness. Although it was roofless and long deserted, although the incense of prayer seldom ascended here, Seyd piously removed his peaked shoes before he entered. Some rain-water, limpid as aquamarine, lay in the shattered basin, and in this he made his ablutions.

Seating himself on one of the tilting flagstones, he began to pray, devoutly, utterly oblivious to all his surroundings. This indeed was life, this communion with the Merciful, the Compassionate, Sultan and Sovereign of the Universe, of the seas and the stars, of men and of angels. The power of the Divine interpenetrated every fibre of him, overflowing into his spirit in mystical golden rapture, making his heart blossom in love and the comprehension of heaven. He could understand how the Patriarchs and Prophets who walked with God had endured material existence but for such moments as this, which brought a sense of the everlasting beauty and nobility of the bond betwixt God and man. This was indeed life, joy, victory!

A slight noise behind him disturbed his devotions. He turned his head. He rose quickly. Before him in the gathering shadows which fell like thick curtains upon the little mosque stood a woman heavily veiled. A sudden resentment seized him. To behold a woman there and at such an hour seemed monstrously inappropriate. Some crone, doubtless, who, with the privilege of age, came there to make secret devotions. Then he saw by her bare feet, white as alabaster, that she was a young woman. It was not meet that he should be there alone with her. He would go.

But as he made to do so, he found his way barred by a shapely arm.

"Stay, Seyd," she said in a deep rich voice that thrilled him to the deepest places of his blood. "Stay, for I am the answer to your prayer."

Amazed, he could scarcely speak. "How lady," he stammered. "I seem known to you, but . . . Then the truth of the matter rushed in upon him. This was some woman of love, some courtesan who had tracked him here, seeking to beguile him and bring him to shame, a ghoul, perhaps, sent by Eblis to destroy him, soul and body.

"Let me pass," he said sternly. Her answer was to raise her veil, and at the sight, Seyd gave back in amazed terror, for at once he knew that this was no mere mortal

beauty, but a miraculous and elemental loveliness such as it is given only to the inspired and the saintly to behold.

"Who art thou?" he asked in great fear, his flesh shaking as though it would fall asunder and dissolve.

"Ask not my name, Seyd. Be content that I have been sent to thee in answer to thy unuttered prayers. Allah in His great mercy has understood that for thee and such as thee no mortal woman can suffice. But as it is necessary that the soul of woman should unite with that even of the most wise and pious of mankind, such as I have been raised up by Allah to attend them in order that the miracle of nature's unity may be made complete."

Seyd was silent for a long time. "Much of what you say is dark to me," he said at last. "It may be that in my dreams and even while in prayer I have sought the perfect woman, though I knew it not. But how am I to know whether you are of the divine or a demon from Eblis? Sheitan sends strange and beautiful shapes to decoy the holy from their allegiance to Allah."

The woman laughed. "Nay, seek not to number me among the devils," she said, "for were I a demon I might not utter the name of Allah. Nor might I enter this holy mosque, deserted as it is. And that I am more than woman; you have but to look at me to be convinced. Come, Seyd, reject me not, for it is the will of Allah that you should love and cherish me, of Allah who would have nothing single, who has sent love into the world for all men's worship and acceptance."

As she spoke, she drew near, and, holding out her arms, folded him in an embrace so full of warm life and rapture, that, intoxicated, he returned it with almost equal ardour. His senses reeled at her kisses, his mood of cold insensibility fell from him like a garment outworn. For the first time he experienced the overwhelming miracle of love. The hours passed with dreamlike rapidity in the little mosque. Seyd, the passionless, the chilly hearted, felt himself transported as if to the seventh heaven of delight. Profound as was the rapture of prayer, of communion with Allah, this was an experience more divine.

"You have not told me your name," he said, "but already I know it. For you are Mystery, whom all men love, but whose love few achieve while still in life."

"Mystery I am, as thou sayest, O Seyd," she replied. "Yet is that not all of me. I am something more, something you encounter every day, something you love well, and for which you would gladly give your life, yet which daily you tread under your feet."

"You are also Love, mayhap?"

"Yes. Love I am, Love the most profound, a love surpassing that of the mother for the son, the sailor for the sea."

A thin light broke through the canopy of the darkness.

"It is the hour before dawn," whispered the woman, "we must part, Seyd, my beloved. But come to me here soon. I shall keep tryst here each nightfall in the hope of meeting thee."

And so they parted with a lingering kiss. Seyd quickly made his way back to the barge, to find that his four negroes had long fallen asleep. Awaking them, he was rowed speedily home. All night he dreamed of the woman he had met in the ruined mosque.

When he rose next day, it was to be assailed with doubt. Surely she must be a thing of evil, a ghoul such as the peasants spoke of, haunting ruined mosques and graveyards, a lamia such as the old legends told of, seeking to lure men to destruction. Yet of evil in her he had seen not the least admixture. Her bearing, her speech were natural and unaffected. It was chiefly the comprehension of something elemental in her, some power indescribable, that nurtured his misgivings.

All that day he walked in his garden, deep in meditation. That his lady had entered a mosque showed at least that she was not a thing, an appearance, sent by the powers of Eblis for his destruction. Holy mullahs and imaums praying in the desert, had been beset by such, and through their influence, delivered over to the father of night. There was, of course, no imaginable test by which he could know absolutely that she was veritably a woman, unless he

traced her to her dwelling-place. He recalled it as strange that when he had glanced back at the mosque when halfway to his barge that he had not seen her emerge from the only doorway the shrine had.

At nightfall, after a troubled day, he ordered his caique once more, and was rowed to the little jetty. It was now almost quite dark, and as he entered the mosque, he saw a white shape bending to and fro in the actions of prayer. This dissolved his last fear that he had to deal with a creature unhallowed. Springing forward, he seized her in his arms, and was greeted with rapture.

"The day has been long," he said, "but its sorrows are over. I have thought of you through all the hours. I must know who you are—know your name."

"My name, beloved? Call me the Rose of Istamboul if thou wilt, for indeed I have none other you may know."

"The Rose of Istamboul! Truly that is a fair name enough, sweet, and so I shall call you, for the present at least. But when you become my bride, then I must know your true name."

"Your bride, Seyd? Am I not already your bride? Think you that the muttering of a few words by the imaum alone makes man and woman one?"

"But I am resolved that you shall dwell in my house, moon of my eyes," cried Seyd in agitation. Nay, it must be so."

"Let us forget the thoughts of men for the present," she replied, clinging to him. "Let us remember only the elemental things—the things which make up real existence."

And so the night passed as that before it had done, and night after night Seyd met the Rose of Istamboul. He might not put aside his longing that they should share existence wholly, by day as well as by night. He craved to see her in his house, to eat with her, to share the common things of life with her, and often did he tell her so. But to his pleadings she was silent. When he spoke thus, not a word did she answer.

At length he resolved to discover her identity, to find out where she lived. He had never, so far, seen her come

or go at their rendezvous. So one night after leaving her in the little mosque as usual, he waited in the shadow of the trees which surrounded it, intent on following her.

Nearly half an hour passed, and he had almost resolved to retrace his steps to see whether she still remained in the mosque, when she passed the spot where he had concealed himself. Creeping stealthily from his hiding-place, he followed her. She walked slowly for some considerable distance over the rough bent which stretched between the seashore and the city. Suddenly, the first ray of daylight throbbed across the sapphire dusk of night. Distracted from his intention for an instant by the beauty of the sight, an arrow of silver flying across an azure shadow, he cast his glance upward, and when he brought it back to the point where she had last appeared it was to find no trace of her. She had vanished as completely as though she had dissolved into the vapours of the morning which now began to rise from the plains behind the sea.

In a frenzy he ran onward, calling her name. "Rose, Rose of Istamboul, where are you?" But nothing could he see except the level bent where sand lay at the roots of each tuft of coarse grass, nothing could he hear except the low wind of sunrise sighing across the waste.

Despondently, he returned to his barge, and was rowed homeward. He had become aware that Zara, his chief wife, was suspicious of his nightly movements. Although she made no complaint, she frequently looked at him with deep reproach. As for the others, for days at a time he scarcely saw them. All three had become repugnant to him. To free himself from them was impossible.

Then he recalled that this woman who had taken him body and soul had told him that she was more than woman, that she was, indeed, the answer to his prayer—a prayer he had been unconscious of offering up. Of what folly had he not been capable? That, good or evil, the Rose of Istamboul was a creature of spiritual mould he was now assured. Her disappearance on the seashore in the twinkling of an eye proved as much. He must see her no more,

he must content himself with life as he found it; as a true man should.

So no more he went to the mosque in the little wood. Days passed, and, although grief gnawed at his heart as a serpent, he kept his own house at nights. His wife Zara was pleased with him, and even refrained from tormenting the little Greek, Danäe, while the young but experienced Ayesha, who had been married before to an elderly roué, smiled secretly, and tittered when he went to the casement, opening it on the view of the Golden Horn.

But he could not harden his heart against the Rose of Istamboul, for the lure of her was such as it is not given to man to resist, the lure of earth, of air, of nature, of the deep, indwelling life which lies in the soil's womb, in the bodies of trees, in the breath of life which we call the wind. All that the eye might see, all that the ear might hear, recalled the miracle of her, who was compounded of atoms and essences natural and delectable. The woods were her hair, the planets her eyes, the sea her spirit. And Seyd knew that she might not be escaped by any man, because, as she had said, she was not only woman, but all that woman in her essential native vigour and power and divine sweetness brings to man in one body—the rapturous spirit of that earth of which he is himself a part, the less vivid, the less daedal part, the nymphic fire that from the oak conceives the dryad, that from the stream brings forth the naiad, that pagan fury which not only receives the life of which man is the vessel, but which has power, like its mother the earth, to bring it to harvest and fruition.

Stunned for a space by the revelation of what he had lost, he leaped from his divan with the frenzy of a man who had cast away a whole world. His slaves shrank from him in terror when they beheld him. With speechless gestures, he commanded them to prepare the caique. They obeyed, and in a few moments he was cleaving the waters of the Golden Horn once more, the foam rising upon the plow, turning into snow the reflected heaven of Bosphorus.

And so he came to the little mosque and found her

there. Once more he was enfolded in her arms, he drank of her loveliness.

"Ah," she cried, gazing into his eyes with rapture, "all is well at last. You know Seyd, you understand. For I am what comes to all poets, I am the soil as woman, as bride, she who at last arises out of the earth they love better than themselves to cherish them and be with them always. I am the Rose of Istamboul!"

The Green Mantle of Immunity

It was very strange that when the Professor had finished his story, I saw that the copper merchant, like all of us, had packed his stuff but a mantle of green silk.

We had journeyed some miles when he handed a packet to me. "I am already overloaded, my brother-in-the-faith," said I to the copper merchant, "can you not accommodate even this little parcel on your camel?"

He could; but he wanted me to possess that mantle.

"After journeying and thinking, thinking in the vastness of the desert," he said with a curious light in his eyes, "and the more especially of the love-stricken story of the Sheikh, our pilgrimage companion, I prefer not to possess this mantle, this thing that I cherished above my life's blood: for it brings reflection to my heart. Take this burqa," he said, "that I may forget it: and what it means to me—so that I may die with prayers of peace on my lips."

Neither I nor the Sheikh could forget what he could tell us of the history of the garment, and he related it with not a little anguish in his heart. Let me give it in his own words:

In the ancient valley of Shairabad, which lies between the great desert of Iran and the Blue Mountains of the Hindu-Killer range, he told us, lay the town of Shamshad. In a palace upon the hill guarding the city dwelt the Princess Zahril, whose beauty of face and form was so great that the Moon-god must have made her himself; so said the heathen tongues. Her husband, Hassan, the Sultan, would not allow her to be seen by the vulgar eyes of the common people; for the people of the bazaars were unworthy to have an eyefull of so great a lady.

Whenever the princess went abroad, it was always in a closed carriage drawn by two white horses. Four eunuchs accompanied her, two in front who drove, and two who ran behind; and when she would reach her destination, which might be the bath or the old rug-sellers or the fortune-tellers, the door of the carriage would be opened

swiftly by one of the eunuchs, and the form of the princess shrouded in her burqa would slip out and be gone in a flash; so the world saw little of her, and she, poor child, saw less of them, and was sad, therefore.

In the evening she used to sit upon the roof of her apartments in the palace and gaze longingly at the twinkling lights of the dim town below her, hearing with a sigh the faint noise of the inhabitants singing and laughing, as the night wind from the hills drifted up the slope to her. . . .

She did not mind being veiled—she was brought up to this custom—but she did wish that she could *walk* to the town in her burqa, which, after all, covered her completely, instead of having to ride in a hard, bumpy, hot carriage, whose windows blinded her from all interesting sights in the streets; but her husband was a strict man, and told her that the sights of the town were not for her, to risk having her burqa blown away or torn from her, leaving her for all unclean eyes to see. . . .

So she sat upon the roof and sang sad snatches of song to the moon which hung like a large pearl in the velvet sky.

Mameena, her faithful attendant, would weep softly, because the songs were full of a longing for that which, considering all things, could hardly be expected to happen —the princess, you see, sang of a strange and handsome young Prince who, some day, would come out from between two stars, mounted upon a golden-winged steed, and carry her away in his arms to where they were not so strict about concealing their women. . . . At this point, however, she would cease her singing, because she knew of no such country nor could her fancy force her to construct it, so closing her dark lustrous eyes she slept, and Mameena quieted her weeping. . . .

The stars went out, the sky paled, and the night crept unobserved away.

One day, when Zahril was standing lost in thought beside the turquoise fountain in the centre of her zenana courtyard, absently throwing a few sweetmeat crumbs to the feathery goldfish swimming in the shallow basin, Mameena approached and bowed before her.

"Oh princess," said she, "I think that I have found a way."

"To what, Mameena?" replied Zahril, turning round. Her golden anklets tinkled softly.

"I have constructed a garment, princess, which I think will please your lord and master and soften his will so that you may go walking to the town."

"Alas, Mameena. I fear it will be of no avail." The princess raised her lovely face and looked at the square of blue sky above her.

"Come and but see," urged the slave. So they went into the harem.

Upon a divan was spread out a shining thing of green. It was in the shape of a wide, long bag, with two small openings for the feet at the bottom, and an opening at the top by which one entered, and, once inside, was fastened about the head and face, leaving only a narrow slit for the eyes.

"I wonder . . ." murmured Princess Zahril. "It is, or seems to be, indeed impenetrable, and would safeguard me against any ill wind. Come, let us try it on."

Mameena helped her into the garment which she naïvely called the Mantle of Immunity, and fastened it about her mistress's head. The princess surveyed her green-enveloped form in a tall mirror, and her eyes glistened with hope and pleasure through the slits of the head-piece. . . . The mantle fell in soft clinging lines from her head to her feet, her muffled hands rippling the lights over the folds as she moved them in a childish joy. . . . Her little feet peeped through the holes at the bottom like shy pink children.

"Surely I am secure enough in this," thought the princess, "for it cannot blow up, or to one side as I am locked in at head and foot and cannot even show my hands should I wish it, and if I wear my burqa, too, over this green mantle of security, my lord cannot but allow me to roam abroad on foot. . . . I will visit him now and show him. . . ."

She moved away from the mirror and walked, a ravishing

vision of swathed green grace, towards her husband's apartments. . . .

Prince Hassan, preceded by a servitor, entered and surveyed the muffled enigma before him.

"My lord," said his wife's voice, "we have constructed this mantle and I am come in it to beseech you to allow me to go abroad on foot, as it is so fashioned that it cannot blow away or expose any part of my unworthy body. See . . ." and she moved this way and that, turning and twisting to show that indeed there was no concealed opening in the green silken shroud.

Hassan was rather entranced. Here was his sweet princess, of whose exquisite beauty and gentleness no one but he knew, standing before him, a shimmering little figure of appealing helplessness. Her muffled hands billowed towards him in a gesture of petition, and the light from the silk played up and down her silhouette like magician's fire. . . . At that moment he loved her very much. He gripped passionately the stretched material beneath which were her henna-tipped fingers. Zahril returned his touch with a warm pressure and leaned towards him. Her eyes through the narrow aperture in her cloak were dark with pleading.

"My lord," she whispered, "I will wear my burqa too over this—then, surely, you will let me go."

The Sultan nodded slowly. "Go," he said. "But have a care that you speak to no one."

And so at last the Princess Zahril went forth into the city on foot. It was late in the afternoon when her doubly veiled form slipped past the palace gates. An evening breeze curled her pale-blue burqa around her knees, showing for an instant a flash of shining green—the mantle of immunity, to her a wonderful mantle of freedom. . . . She was very excited, and, though the poor child could scarcely see for all her veilings, it was sufficient to make her heart beat rapturously inside her breast.

Past the avenues of palms she went, where children frolicked happily in the late sunshine. She held her burqa, as best she could, close about her face, so that she should

not miss a sight of anything. . . . Again the evening breeze rustled around the corner of the market square and pressed her wrappings softly against her side. She experienced a sensation of cosiness, of being encased safely against the evils of the world and its lecherous eyes, and she squirmed deliciously, like one does in a warm bed on a cold night.

Silently she wandered about the streets and bazaars. Here were other Moslem women enveloped in white or black, haggling in low monotones and lifting up the bottoms of their burqas so that they might seize their purchases and retire again like turtles. The princess turned into an alleyway and caught a blurred view of a crescent moon above a tall minaret. Low overhanging zenana balconies, all shuttered, as she was, against prying eyes, cast deep shadows before and behind her. . . . Suddenly she felt afraid; she was so helpless, so utterly incapable of free movement. . . . The light seemed to fade out of the sky. . . . She wandered on, peering into open doorways where rug merchants and jewel craftsmen placidly plied their trades, seated cross-legged upon some priceless piece of carpet. . . . Then, out of the purple shadows back of a tumbledown stable a tall figure appeared. He was clad in misty white, and the face under his turban was the handsomest the Princess Zahril had ever seen—even in her early youth, before she became purdah— . . . A star seemed to gleam from his forehead. Her heart stood still and she shrank back. The man's eyes burned through all her veilings. . . . Could this be the strange prince of whom she was wont to sing? Where was his steed?

No sooner had the thought entered her mind than she saw it standing behind him, its wings gleaming dully in the fading light.

"Come," said the tall stranger, "I have found you at last. No veil can keep your beauty hidden from me."

Swiftly he seized her enshrouded form in his arms and leapt into the saddle. The horse snorted once and they rose into the air, sailing past the minaret, and past the

bazaars, where the people looked like silly dim ants crawling about. . . .

"Lift up your burqa and put your arms about me," said the stranger, "and you will rest easier."

"I cannot," whispered Zahril, "for I am veiled again beneath it, and cannot stretch out my arms by reason of their being confined within an inner impenetrable cloak which has no opening."

The stranger looked down at her invisible face and smiled.

"Such beauty is well guarded," he murmured, "but we will see."

So they travelled silently for many hours, and Zahril was filled with a strange contentment. Presently she felt herself to be dropping and attempted to grasp her prince's arm.

"Here we will rest," said he.

The winged steed came down lightly to earth and the princely stranger lifted Zahril to the ground. The crescent moon was fading low upon the horizon, and the dawn shed its pale radiance upon them.

"Come—let me see your face, my love," and he removed the princess's burqa, while she stood trembling before him. Then he unfastened the mantle of immunity, and it fell like a shining waterfall to her feet. . . . She stretched out her slender arms in a gesture of sudden freedom, and her lovely eyes met his, unabashed.

Day was breaking and the ever-growing light showed them to be in a vast fertile plain, dotted with clumps of fringed palms. The place was carpeted with beautiful white flowers, whose faint scent filled the air with a strange and entrancing fragrance.

"My love . . ." murmured the stranger, "I cannot speak for the ecstasy which grips my heart . . . you are too beautiful to be real. . . . We are in a dream. O Light of my Desire, let us love before the sun, in his zeal for reality, glares at us and we disappear."

"Do not speak so, my prince," sighed Zahril, twining her fingers in his hair, "for I have waited long for this to

come to pass. . . . Oft have I sung upon my zenana roof-top of your coming, never daring or hoping that it might be true. . . . My master is so hard and strict, and I am young and (you say) beautiful. . . . Why am I not ashamed at my being unveiled, for I have been veiled so much and so severely; but, somehow, I feel that I have always loved you, my strange and noble prince. . . . Look, the sun cometh, and I am frightened . . . lest you depart from me. . . ."

They sank down upon the white flowers at their feet. The soft wind of morning lifted the mantle of immunity from the ground where the princess had dropped it and spread it over her feet. Life, to Zahril, was just beginning. The hours seemed to rush by, whispering to one another.

. . . . . .

"Ayah, my mistress, awake, or you will be touched by the cruel sun, for he is well up in the sky. . . ."

Zahril opened her eyes to find herself lying upon her roof-top in the full light of the morning. Mameena was crouching beside her, gently squeezing her shoulder.

She was alone. . . . Zahril uttered a low cry. . . . A dream, a dream, just as her prince had feared . . . and the mantle of immunity?

"Where is my mantle of immunity, Mameena?"

"Mistress, I know of no such mantle," she responded. "We have the new black burqa which my lord brought . . ."

"No, no! Ah, woe . . . I am as I was before. Allah is just, Allah is merciful," and bowing her little head the princess wept bitterly.

Suddenly she stopped. . . . Could she not describe this garment to Mameena, and then one could be made, and she could repeat in reality what she had dreamed. There was no reason why Lord Hassan should not give his consent. . . . Allah was kind, for he had blessed her with an idea while she slept.

So the mantle of immunity was actually made by Mameena, and the Princess Zahril wore it into her husband,

36 and pleaded in her most alluring manner for the limited freedom that she, poor child, desired. But, alas, here my story must end, for the Sultan was adamant, and would not let her go, save only in her carriage.

Therefore, every night when the moon was over the mountains, the princess walked upon the roof of her zenana, clad in her beautiful mantle of immunity, and sang, in a broken little voice, of her strange and handsome prince. . . . And the cool breezes of the dark would press the silken folds of her dream shroud against her drooping body, and she would try very hard to believe that they were the arms of her prince who, for all that she knew, still lay beside his winged steed upon that flower-dotted plain.

The Copper Merchant Explains

As I have said, the copper merchant gave me this green mantle of immunity, which had belonged to the lovely Princess Zahril; and I have it, but somehow I sensed that his story was not ended—as indeed, what story in Life is ever ended, except by Death: and then, who can tell?

So one evening I again sought his company. The sun was almost set and the streets of Konia were soaked in gold, stained with rich purple shadows. Crowds ambled past me, chattering: camels loomed grunting under vast loads of produce: drivers shouted . . . yet the soft golden light of evening reduced this raucous bedlamic din almost to an harmonious murmur. . . . Two women, clad in white impenetrable burqas, glided by in silence, and one of them turned her invisible shrouded face to peer at me through the narrow strip of lacework which stretched across the place where her eyes must be. . . . Zahril? It might be. . . . No, Zahril's burqa was blue, a light dreamy blue. . . .

I reached the copper merchant's sarai. The inevitable coffee was produced after the inevitably elaborate greetings. Outside, the gold was changing gently to blue. Another woman passed, paused and turned to lift a small copper cooking bowl with one muffled hand, holding her burqa about her faceless head with the other. The copper merchant half rose, but the woman laid down the bowl and slid away.

"Tell me," I said, "what happened in the end to the Princess Zahril?"

"Ah, Agha, what, indeed, could happen? Dreams, so it is said, go by opposites, and the Princess Zahril had had a pleasant dream . . . a beautiful dream. . . ."

"But the green mantle that you gave to me," I persisted. "Did you get it at her death . . . or, well, how?"

"You are so curious," sighed the copper merchant, fondling his beard, "you can never leave a tale at its poetical conclusion. We have left Zahril, clad in her

shining green mantle, upon her zenana roof, sighing with a delicious and heart-rending sadness for her Dream Prince. . . . Then, because I felt that your interest in the story was not idle curiosity, but something a little higher, like a love, shall we say, of the improbable or impossible, I gave you this green mantle, to dream about. . . . Ai, ai . . . I suppose 'tis but natural for you to want to know more, though to me, and, Agha sahib, I *have been* young, I would rather be ignorant of the *facts* of the sequel, and let my *fancy* paint it as it desires. . . ."

"But come, old man of much wisdom, unless the sequel be dull or uninteresting, why leave it out?"

"Who can judge what is interesting and what is not interesting . . . ? Only Fate, the Mind of the Hearer, or, perchance, the Voice of the Teller; whilst that which remains untold is always filled with interest. . . . Is it not so? And what makes you so certain that there *is* a sequel?"

"The mantle . . . that I have . . ." I said gently.

Suddenly the copper merchant drained his coffee and set down the cup in the darkness behind him.

. . . . . .

Mameena (he began), the Princess' faithful servant and attendant, was my sister. Captured in a caravan raid, which cost my father his life, when she was only three years of age, she and my mother came somehow into Hassan's possession when he was but a mere stripling Prince. My mother died almost at once of injuries received at the hands of these marauders, may Allah burn their black souls! . . . And I, sahib, was left an orphan, apprenticed at the age of ten to Habib Alam, the blind potter of Tiflis . . . a devout servant of Allah and a friend of my father.

Mameena grew up in Hassan's service . . . we used to meet twice a year, when I had saved enough dinar to make the journey from Tiflis to Kabul by camel . . . nearly twenty years ago, now.

When he espoused Zahril, she became her own personal friend and attendant.

Hassan is now dead. . . . Mameena, three years afterwards, married, at the age of twenty-two, a noble owner of camels, and wears the black silk burqa of the wealthy Peshawar woman. . . . She met him . . . but no matter, that is another story, sahib, and the world is full of stories; am I not telling one? Too much almond spoils the best dish of mutton. . . . This was twelve years ago. Her son brings happiness to my declining years by helping me in my shop.

And the Princess Zahril, upon the evening that Mameena left for the zenana of her husband, was very sad. There were big tears, as beautiful as Ceylon pearls, Mameena tells me, in the Princess's eyes. . . . How lovely she must have looked, sahib. . . . Eyes, always dark with longing, soft with patience, melting with love for her Prince of the Stars . . . filling swiftly with tears. . . . She drew the green mantle from a cedarwood chest and handed it to my sister.

"My faithful friend," she said softly, "take this, the sign of my late imprisonment, and unforgettable memory of my Dream of True Love. If ever Allah wills that this dream shall come to pass in reality, I shall, by some message, bid you make me another still more beautiful, in shining tissue of gold, and you shall bring it to me: clad yourself in the dear green one. . . . *Then* we shall see. . . . Do not fail me, Mameena."

And so Mameena took her departure, the shining mantle of immunity concealed beneath her burqa . . . wondering, and with sobs racking her throat.

Four years ago, sahib, I was in the city of Peshawar, visiting my noble brother-in-law. We were at meat. . . . Ali Shazar (for such was his name) was happy. Trade in Bokharan camels was thriving; his coffers were well filled, and his little son, by Mameena, now eight years old, was a fountain of bliss to him.

We were seated in an upper chamber and the clamour of the bazaar was sinking to a drowsy murmur as evening

drew nigh. Behind us, screened by a thick Purdah curtain sat Mameena, at work upon a new embroidered shirt for her son . . . She was crooning softly to herself. . . . Ali Shazar arose with a smile and called to her to join us at our coffee.

Shyly she entered and the curtains fell with a low thud behind her. . . . An odour of rose and jasmine was in the room. . . . Temple bells seemed to be ringing afar off . . . her ankles. . . . My dear sister still retained her mother's dark Persian beauty of face and suppleness of figure. . . . I kissed her on the forehead and noticed that her dusky eyes appeared deep and lost. She sat down beside me and waited to be addressed—for such, sahib, is the custom.

"Blessings and greetings, O my sister," I said, "and how fares my little nephew?"

"Well, my brother, well. He sleeps now upon the roof."

She looked away and sighed. Could it be that her past life, warped by early enforced servitude and captivity—for, sahib, we are not a family of servants; the blood of the Uzbek Amirs is in our veins—had given her this sad mien. . . . Yet, she had been well treated. Ali Shazar looked also upon his wife and spoke.

"Beloved, mother of my son, why are you so sad tonight?"

A servant came in with a tallow lamp and swiftly Mameena covered her face with her muslin head-veil. . . . The door closed behind him again and she looked up, letting the veil fall slowly through her jewelled hands. . . . I noticed that there was a long thread of gold lying across the full lap of her white silken pyjamas . . . a part of little Ali's shirt, all gold embroidered while he slept beneath the kind warm stars. . . .

"Nay, my lord, I am not sad," she replied, "only, perchance, a little weary; for this shirt upon which I work for our son needs steady eyes and careful fingers."

"Where is your late mistress, the lovely Princess Zahril?" I asked.

"My brother," Mameena shot a startled glance at me,

"I . . . I know not for sure, now. 'Tis said that she lives still in her palace above the town, where she had dwelt with Hassan. . . . When she goes abroad, the townsfolk say that she leaves her purdah-cart at their gates and goes to a certain place behind the market, near an old caravan sarai, where she stands quite still, sometimes for an hour, like some veiled monument, listening . . . waiting to catch the sound of the whirring wings of her Prince's steed. . . . I have told you of her dream, these many years ago, my brother. The townsfolk think her mad, but . . . but I cannot believe it. One day we shall know . . . when she summons me. This also have I told you."

"Bah!" Ali Shazar grinned, "it is madness, all of it. Woman's fancy . . . where do you hear this gossip? The Princess Zahril is by now wedded safely to another. . . . Such a beautiful fruit remains not long unplucked. It is eight years and more since you have seen her."

Mameena was silent. She seemed to be looking beyond us, far away over the city of Peshawar, into the night, where lay the mountains of the North, sleeping like giants. . . . Presently she arose and prepared to leave us. . . . The golden thread drifted to the floor. . . . Her anklets tinkled softly.

"There was a star set in his forehead," she murmured, "and a star is, by many, considered a symbol of Truth . . . and . . . and, my lord, thou knowest that I do not gossip. . . ."

The curtains fell, and I heard her footsteps become fainter as she sought her own apartment. The scent of rose and jasmine still hung about the room.

"She still dreams of her beloved Princess," said Ali Shazar. "I cannot stop her; and she clings to this strange green mantle, though she has never worn it: she awaits, so she says, the call. . . ." He laughed indulgently.

The night wind blew chill into the room and the lamp wavered. . . . I had never seen Mameena so sad. . . . A Star, symbol of Truth.

Ali Shazar was laughing, and put his arm about my shoulder.

"She often talks like that," he said, "but I do not mind. . . . There can be no harm in such a fancy." He was a good man and kind, loving his wife with a gentleness that should be an example to all devout Moslems; for there be many, whom I know, who would have, by now, beaten all this poetic nonsense out of their wives with the lash. . . . But Ali Shazar only smiled. . . . After all, sahib, eight years had gone by without a sign. . . .

(The copper merchant paused, and quickly I shifted my position. Sitting upon the floor where an oven is buried becomes decidedly uncomfortable when one is not born to it. He reached over and courteously placed a cushion at my back.)

The next day, sahib, I was conversing with a moulder of casts at the northern end of the bazaar. . . . I happened to turn and jump at the sound of a camel grunting. It was only sinking into its usual awkward position for loading, and I laughed at my sudden nervousness. . . . Suddenly the laugh died in my throat; for, in the sunlight across the street, I saw a woman's figure shrouded from head to foot . . . in *green.* Held in her muffled hands—for her cloak had no opening—was a small glittering bundle of some gold material. She was about to step into a shuttered carriage, to which were harnessed two magnificent white steeds. . . . A black attendant leapt to shut the door upon this green-veiled woman. . . . Could it be possible?

I darted into the sunshine, blinking like an owl. Already the carriage had started off at a dangerous speed, followed by shouts and curses from the scattering crowds in the street.

I stood, with the dust swirling around me, like one hypnotized, my mouth agape, hearing the angry cries of the bazaar as something miles away . . . a distant buzzing of bees . . . Mameena!

I started to run. . . . Whence had this carriage come? How did she get the message? Was there a message? . . . I stopped. . . . The carriage had reached the North Gate, rattled through it and was gone. . . . Only a cloud of man-infested dust remained.

Somehow I found Ali Shazar. He was in the camel market, examining a young milk-white Bokharan foal. I related to him all that I had seen. . . . He laughed and told me that I was as fanciful and romantic as my sister; but we hurried to his house nevertheless.

Sahib, she *had* gone. . . . Ali was dumbfounded. Entering the women's quarters, we searched her apartments.

There was a message, placed beneath a bowl of fragrant Himalayan roses, which ran, as nearly as I can remember, thus:

"Ali, my Lord. . . . I was summoned by the Princess Zahril yesterday morning, and I have gone to keep the promise that was made between us, these eight years ago. I fashioned the Golden Mantle of Immunity early last evening—perhaps that was why I seemed to be sad, for I am filled with a strange fear concerning all this. Her carriage awaits me now in the bazaar. If you wonder how the summons reached me, remember that the stars sometimes can whisper, and the Prince, her Prince, was of the stars. Pulyah is holding out the green mantle to me . . . dear faithful black Pulyah; he, too, is frightened. He was glad to see me after eight years. My Princess, he says, is more beautiful than ever.

"I go. Forgive me, my husband, and you too, my brother. I shall return as soon as I am able, craving your indulgence. This is not madness, though I dared not tell you last evening, when I knew. . . . Kiss my little son for me."

The gold thread . . . drifting down . . . last night when so sadly she had sat beside me. . . . It was this strange golden cloak that she had been making, not little Ali's shirt. If only I had realized fully, we could have stopped this mad quest then.

That evening we rode out of Peshawar, Ali Shazar and I, upon our search for Mameena. My brother-in-law's countenance was pale with anger and anxiety. Somehow I felt that Zahril would not wittingly cause harm, and I said as much. Ali grunted and drove his spurs into his horse . . . but I could see that he shared my opinion.

We knew not where to go, save in the direction of the dead Prince Hassan's palace near the mountains of the North. We rode hard, a faint hope stirring in our breasts that we might catch up with the carriage and its helplessly muffled occupant.

The sun sank away out of sight and the sky was o'erspread with green and gold, and green again. . . . Ali Shazar shivered as he looked upon the colours.

Night fell and our spirits with her. . . . We crouched beside a small charcoal stove that we had brought, wrapped in our travelling mantles of Persian wool—for the nights are cold, sahib, in the mountains. Suddenly a star leapt from its place and swerved down behind the black ragged line of hills in front of us.

"The Prince," muttered Ali Shazar.

"This is the season for falling stars," I whispered, "and we are *not* part of the Thousand and One Nights fancies. . . . Zahril perchance is lying ill, or has dreamed again. . . . What danger can there be?"

"Yes, yes, my brother, but what if there be fever in the hill country? And the Princess has it . . . perhaps . . . O Mameena, what has possessed you? 'Tis too strange; I cannot think clearly . . . only we *must* find her . . . that star. . . . Who knows but what Shahzade may have conceived another tale for her master, and we are called by Allah to be her puppets. . . ."

"Be calm, Ali. . . . Why should the Prince be a myth, this time? Zahril is not so old, and there are men still about who would espouse a widow. . . . Come, the darkness is filling us with senseless fear. Probably we will find that there will have been no need for this journey."

In this manner did I try, sahib, to quell the sensations of unearthly agitation that were gripping our hearts.

At dawn of the second day we reached the Palace of Hassan. Yes . . . the villagers had seen a shuttered carriage pass through only the day before towards the Hill. . . . Princess Zahril? No, she had not been seen these last six days. . . . One always knew her by her pale

blue silken burqa. . . . Did the carriage enter the palace gates? It was dark, masters, but it went surely in that direction. . . . We climbed the hill, and the warmth of the newly awakened sun smote upon our backs. The gates of the palace were open, so we dismounted and hastened across the threshold of Princess Zahril's domain. Down a long colonnade of fretted marble and blue-stone we passed. In the distance on our right hand a flood of sunshine cut the dimness of the passage with a streaming shaft of light. Out of this shaft a tall negro came towards us; his face showed some surprise. Ali Shazar drew ahead of me, and spoke.

"Are you Pulyah?" he said. The negro started slightly, then nodded.

"My wife is here," continued my brother-in-law, "the lady veiled in green. . . . Is everything all right?"

Pulyah appeared to be puzzled.

"The Princess Zahril sent me to fetch her, this lady in green, my lord, because Someone comes today. . . . It is a promise. The Princess did not know that you would also. . . . There is nothing made ready for any guests. . . . We expect to journey afar off. Will my lord wait in the court until the Princess can be consulted? Here upon the right. . . . It will not be too hot. There is shade."

"What reason has Princess Zahril for sending for my wife like this. . . . A dream, a dream. . . . Where are they now?"

"My lord, they are in the zenana together, waiting. What danger can there be? The Prince is coming. . . . Three nights ago His Star, the one that hangs just below the moon, a little to the right, fell from its place, and my mistress heard him in the night. . . . He said that he was coming for her . . . . today."

Pulyah looked at us steadily. I shivered. Were we all asleep? Soon I would wake up and find that I had been dozing over my evening coffee at Ali's house in Peshawar. . . . But we were *not* dreaming. A dream does not consider Time; and these last two days of anxiety and

hard riding had not been timeless or, again as in a dream, untiring to the physical senses.

Ali Shazar passed a hand across his forehead. Pulyah most deferentially motioned us towards the patch of sunlight.

"If my lords will wait but a short while in this court," he said, "I will hasten and inform the Princess and the Lady Mameena of my lords' arrival. This way."

It was the only thing, for the moment, to do. Not knowing in which direction lay the women's quarters, we could not make a dash for them. Besides, what could there be to be afraid of? Only it was all so fantastic. We followed the negro in silence.

Into the sunlit patch we stepped and turned to the right through a high carved arch into the open, blinking. . . .

Sahib, it was beautiful! This court was built out abruptly from the massive walls of the palace and hung over a deep mountain gorge. On three sides of us were low walls of a smooth, shell-pink texture. In one corner a massive palm rose from the black squares of paving that covered the floor. Cushions and rugs of enchanting texture and softness were laid, as if in expectation of an arrival, in the shade, beneath the palm. The fountain, an exquisitely simple oval bowl, some eight or nine feet in diameter, was let into the floor in the centre. It was fashioned of some smooth metal, unknown to me, and sometimes was bluish in colour, sometimes green; a carved silver cobra reared its length up from a small central pedestal and water spurted shimmering from his mouth and nostrils.

We sat down and waited. Little Ali was asleep almost immediately, his dark head nestled on a huge silken cushion. . . . Ali Shazar and I blinked at the blue heavens that seemed to lick the very walls of the courtyard. The three negroes had disappeared into the gloom of the archway of the colonnade, through which we had entered. . . . The fountain murmured soothingly, and somewhere above us, perhaps in yonder tower which cut a white path into the blue of the morning sky, a pair of doves cooed. Ali Shazar's face fell into shadow and I saw his head nod. . . . When

would Mameena come? Were those voices? No, only the soft singing of the cobra in the bowl. . . . We were very weary from our long forced journey, and anxious. . . .

I slept; and in my dreams I saw, in a dark star-spattered sky, a horseman coming down towards me. His clothes were splendid but simple and a star shone in the front of his white turban, lighting the sky around him as he approached. . . . The walls of the little courtyard seemed to exude a faint phosphorescent light: the cobra was silent in the fountain and the tower of the doves stood resplendent in the cold radiance of an invisible moon. Nearer and nearer came the horseman. Suddenly there appeared in the entrance of the court a glittering figure veiled in gold from head to foot. It walked silently in my direction until, quite close, it stopped. The golden cloak fell in marvellous folds from a round cap of the same material, to the ankles, where the folds were gathered into full trousers which swayed around a pair of small dark feet. Two dark sad eyes gazed softly at me through a narrow slit edged with golden thread. . . . Zahril. . . . Perhaps she was smiling. . . . I felt that she was . . . though I could see nothing of her face, nor, indeed, of any of the rest of her, except her feet, for this shimmering garment was without opening and completely enveloped her, though its fullness allowed some sort of restricted movement for her imprisoned hands. Behind her stood a figure garbed almost identically, only in green silk, a figure that I knew to be Mameena. . . . Ali Shazar had arisen from the darkness beside me and, with his little son clinging to his right arm, was swaying towards his wife. . . . Her invisible hands rustled in some gesture of silence and she whispered to him, her eyes filled with a kind of fearful love. . . . The Princess Zahril seemed to be listening. Then the place was flooded with an unearthly light and I knew that the star-crowned stranger had arrived upon his flying steed. . . .

"At last, beloved, I have come back." The deep music in this stranger's voice and the god-like smile upon his face made my heart to stumble, sending a thick surge of

chill blood through my veins, and I was afraid. . . . We were not in this world, any of us. . . . For a moment my body struggled to awaken my senses, but the spell could not yet be broken. . . . After all, *were* we asleep?

"Let us be gone. . . . Too long have we waited; my palace is in readiness and my roof where sleeps the Dawn awaits us. . . . There you shall take off your golden Shroud of Faith and I shall see what I have not seen since that night upon the Plain, beneath the Mountain. . . . Your face, and your soft tender arms, whose caresses I have always remembered with such exquisite pangs of love and longing. . . . Come, my Princess, my Zahril, my Only Desire."

The stranger seemed to see no one but his beloved. We might have been invisible. . . . Zahril moved slowly towards him, her muffled arms striving to outstretch and trembling, so that the folds of her golden cloak seemed to be filled with flashing cold fire. Her hidden face was raised to his and her eyes were two deep pools of love. . . . Mameena started to follow them, but Ali Shazar, the muscles of his face working strangely, held her back. . . . Little Ali shivered with excitement and wonder. . . .

The stranger Prince of the Stars led Zahril to the low wall, upon the parapet of which stood his celestial steed. The Princess turned and spoke for the first time in a voice so sweet and so moving as to need no assistance of facial expression to convey the depth of her passion. . . . The golden mask seemed to melt away and I saw a beauty of heart and form the like of which I shall never see again.

"Farewell. . . . Farewell my faithful servant and friend, I am going with my Lover into a Valley of Happiness such as this world has never known or ever dreamed of. . . . He has come for me, as I knew he would, and thou hast made me this further emblem of my faith and trust in him and stayed with me during my last hours of waiting. . . . Helpless and glorying in it, I know I cannot show my face or use my hands freely until my Prince of Love removes this wonderful golden emblem of my devotion upon the roof-top in the palace of which he has spoken.

. . . And for the last time, Mameena, I see you as I once saw myself in a mirror, before I wandered in my dream abroad, all these eight years ago. . . . I have aged perhaps in waiting, but I feel myself to be growing younger beneath my veil. . . . By the time the roof of the palace is reached I shall be as my Prince first knew me. . . ."

With a protesting cry her Lover leapt into the saddle and held out his arms to receive the golden shrouded form of Zahril.

Then . . . by some magic of the senses the spell broke. Daylight swarmed upon us in a swirling cloud. . . . Prince and horse were lost in it, but as my vision readjusted itself I saw Zahril stand glittering upon the wall, before she swayed and disappeared over the edge. . . .

Ali Shazar leaned far out looking down and Mameena lay like a crumpled bundle of silk at his feet. Little Ali's dark head lay still and content upon his cushion as it had been before, before all this.

Staggering past the murmuring cobra I joined my brother-in-law at the wall.

Far below (for this court had been built upon the top of two sheer sides of a rocky gorge) lay a shining thing between two boulders, close to a silver ribbon of river. . . . We bowed our heads—so Allah, praised be His Name, decrees—and turned away. The four negroes faced us, their faces blanched beneath their dark skin.

Eventually, sahib, Ali went down with them at Mameena's request by an outside path while I remained and with trembling fingers released Mameena from her green prison. . . . Her face was shrunken with grief, but she said nothing. Little Ali was still asleep.

After an eternity of time my brother-in-law returned alone followed by the negroes, who were trembling in every limb. One of them carried the golden shroud over his arm. Ali Shazar went to his wife, a smile upon his face.

"Fear not, my love," he said softly. "She was not there. . . . We found only the cloak that you had made for her . . . empty of its contents; unstained, untorn. . . . Zahril is happy, though who can condemn if her

Prince could not wait until they had reached his palace before they discarded this golden emblem of their devotion."

And that, sahib, is all. Perhaps you are satisfied.

. . . . .

I went out into the dark . . . marvelling, but also remembering the green turban of my friend the Copper Merchant, the coveted privilege of the Mecca Pilgrim, which put him above speaking deliberate untruths.

In the Mystic House of Allah

From the Near Eastern shores, we journeyed to the Holy Land of Islam; for the natural inclination of every Moslem is to perform the greatest visit of his life to that Sacred City of Mecca.

As I approached the town of Mecca, I said in my heart: "This city is the cradle of my faith, the fountain of its passion, the City Most Desired by all true sons of Islam. What Jerusalem is to the Christian or Benares to the Hindu, Mecca is much more to the Moslem. He who has made the journey thereto is blessed."

The sojourn in Mecca is an experience of extraordinary sanctity, the summit of the religious endeavour of the Moslem saint. None but Moslems are permitted to enter this Holy City.

Before the days of the Prophet Mohamed, Mecca was a "city of silk and silver," the long camel-line continually passing it, laden with incense and spices on their way to Egypt. In those early times it was the site of a shrine of inviolable sanctity and the scene of religious gatherings. Today piety overhangs it like a bright cloud. Its very paving-stones are prayer-mats. Every house is a mosque.

I was only one among the countless thousands of Moslems who annually visit its shrines on the great Islamic quest, the search for that sanctity which alone can bring the Moslem peace. All my life I had yearned to see Mecca, the City of Everlasting Prayer, to behold its Holy of Holies, the heart of the Moslem world, to walk where the Prophet's steps once fell, for the Moslem an experience which nothing else can equal. From all the Eastern world came my fellow-pilgrims, from Central Asia, India, Burma, China, Java and Africa, while their numbers were swollen by devotees from Morocco, Egypt, Palestine and Syria, thousands actuated by the same desire as had moved me to travel hundreds of miles to see the city where the flower of faith blossomed in the heart of the servant of Allah.

My head was shaven, my garment a white sheet, the symbol of penitence. To enable me to journey from

Jedda to Mecca in comfort a mat-covered litter was roped to a camel, and while I was rocked to and fro in this, like a child in a cradle, I kept time with the motion in the recitation of the ninety-nine names of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. "I am in Thy Presence, O Mighty," I chanted, "we are in Thy Presence, we are approaching Thy Throne." Throughout the long hours of the burning desert day, through the ruddy dawn, the violet noon, the grey of evening the prayer of the faithful ascended.

Constantly, during the journey to Mecca from the coast, prayer arose like a cloud of incense from thousands of lips. The murmur of it was like that of millions of bees when the summer comes to Arabia Félix. Even the live-long night, when the moon blossoms on the lake of darkness like a lily, the hours were spent in reading and reciting the Koran or in listening to the exhortations of the mullahs. We stretched our limbs, weary from the jolting on camel-back, on blankets laid on the hot sand. Little sleep was obtained because of the constant calls to prayer from perfervid worshippers and the mutterings of those engaged in reciting passages from "the Book." With the dawn our caravan was once more in motion.

The journey continued through dark defiles of rocky outcrop, and over the beds of dried-up rivers, until at last two white-washed stone pillars loomed up in the bright haze of morning. These mark the boundaries of the Holy City, within which no blood must be shed, and beyond which no non-Moslem may dare, on peril of his life. Another detour, circling great grey rocks, and suddenly, lying in its amphitheatre of sere brown hills, Mecca appeared like a city out of the tales of Scheherazade.

Through the shimmering purple haze which distance made of the fierce desert day I beheld its mosques and minarets lying in what seems unearthly radiance. A great cry arose from thousands of throats: "Mecca! Mecca!" It was almost instantly followed by a deep and reverent silence. The multitude leapt from their camels and prostrated themselves on the sand, sobbing, praising Allah, for our first sight of the goal toward which we had

turned our eyes in prayer five times every day since early childhood.

As we neared the Haram, or the Great Mosque, in the centre of the city, we saw the flat clustering roofs of Mecca lie on the slopes of the hills like the fortalices of some faerie stronghold. Conspicuous from afar, and holding the eye from approach to arrival, was the Great Mosque, a mountainous whiteness surrounded by a vast court swarming with linen-robed pilgrims. Nineteen gates lead to it, and it was bounded by colonnades supported by innumerable arches. Its billowing domes and piercing minarets lent it an appearance extraordinarily romantic and mystic.

A little further on I recognized from photographs the road to the Kaaba, paved with small pebbles. This, the Shrine of the sacred Black Stone, which has stood there from time immemorial, is draped in black silken tapestry which strikes a note of shimmering sable in the midst of snowy whiteness. Hard by is the spot, where, according to our Moslem tradition, Ibrahim stood while the mosque rose slowly stone by stone. There, too, lies the well of Zam Zam, which is the spring revealed to the outcast Hagar by Allah the Compassionate.

I drank, among hundreds of others from the holy well, and in common with many pilgrims soaked foamy lengths of new white cloth in its depths to use later as a funeral shroud, for on the Day of Judgment the virtue inherent in the holy spring will lessen the intense heat which will fill all the earth as with the spirit of fire, when the dead arise to be judged.

No drop of this sacred water must be wasted, and boys carry copper bowls full of it which they distribute free to the worshippers at prayer-time, accepting no reward for a service which they believe can be adequately repaid by Allah alone.

As I gazed upon the Great Mosque I recalled that earthquakes, floods and fires had wreaked their wrath upon it throughout the ages. There the pilgrim, on arriving at the city gates, must immediately repair, even before refreshing himself, must circle the Shrine of the Kaaba and

kiss the Black Stone it contains, and this I hastened to do. I joined the vast crowd that twined in single file past the relic like a great white serpent; sinuous, never ceasing in its motion. Then I betook myself, as is the custom, to the space near the Great Mosque known as Safa-Marva, where I engaged in the ceremony of Sa-ee. This consists in running or walking as quickly as possible seven times across the broad space, an action which symbolizes the running of Hagar in search of water.

In the relentless heat, with bared and shaven head, I awaited the slow passage of my fellow-pilgrims around the Kaaba. The stone, set in silver, is built into the south-east corner of the shrine, which must be circled seven times before the relic is approached. Wave after wave of fervent piety swept over me as I stood there, overwhelmed by the sacred associations of the spot, the centre and nucleus of Moslem life. From childhood I had thought of this hour, immortal in itself, because the impressions then received could never be effaced. I felt as though standing upon the borders of earth and paradise; the most extra-ordinary emanations from above appeared to descend upon me, I was for an hour no longer man, but pure spirit, one with Allah, caught up in rapture of heart to the Holy of Holies.

The Kaaba is merely a small house built of stone slabs, yet it seems a house "not builded with hands," a part of heaven itself, to the Moslem. Neither by day nor night does the scene vary in its precincts. The stream of devotees never ceases to surround its walls, while thousands recline on the ground, hearkening to the exhortations of the mullahs. On the marble pavement which surrounds it two prayer-spots of peculiar sanctity are outlined, and supplication performed upon them is held to be peculiarly acceptable.

The holy Kaaba stands entirely covered by a black tapestry cloth of silk, known as the Kiswa. For centuries this has been woven by pure and pious maidens in Egypt. Round its upper part runs a frieze of verses from the Koran, woven in the richest gold thread. The walls

inside are hung with black cloth, which conceals an overlay of marble slabs and the part of the walls near the ceiling is plated with glimmering beaten silver. The roof is supported by pillars of cedar, from which silver lamps hang in graceful festoons. On a pedestal in one corner rests the Koran, the writing dictated to the early Caliphs of Islamic era.

Certain religious ceremonies must be performed by the pilgrim during his stay, the more important of which are celebrated at Arafat on the Taif road. After preliminary devotions the party of pilgrims to which I was attached left Mecca on the 8th of Zilhij, the first month in the Islamic calendar, along with many others. They gathered in their thousands at noontide, and swarmed from the city precincts into the dusty highway. A detour was made through a narrow ravine where stands the ancient mosque of Muzdafa, on defiling from which the great plain of Arafat extends before the procession. Here is situated a small rocky eminence known as the Hill of Mercy, beneath which lies an artificially constructed space where the ceremonies are carried out.

After noontide prayer, I stood with the rest in the Plain of Arafat and raised my voice in the "call" or recitation of the Lubbaik, the invocation which signifies "Here I am in Thy Presence." This exercise continued until sunset prayer, after which I took my way to the Mosque of Muzdalifah, where the last petition of the night was offered, and where it was necessary for me to remain until just before the break of day.

The night vigil I found to be fulfilled with emotions of the most uplifting nature. Here, in the white-walled sanctuary my fathers for generations had kept watch, and had, like myself, passed through the holy experiences I was now undergoing. Throughout the hours of darkness I was visited by thoughts and ideas the most exalted. It was, indeed, an initiation into the mysteries of Islam which no ordinary religious ceremony can approach. The messengers of Paradise descended, bringing me assurances that as a true follower of the Prophet I should, if I walked

in mercy, humility and righteousness, one day behold the face of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Here at last I came to understand the more certain significance of the phrase, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohamed is His Prophet."

Immediately at sunrise I betook myself to the brown Plain of Arafat once more, where I engaged in morning prayer. The symbolic intention of the rites which follow now engaged my attention, for this was the Great Day of Sacrifice. I followed others to the village of Mina, thus retracing my steps on the road to Mecca. Like others, too, I searched for seven small stones, fragments of flint, and these I cast at a heap of stones known as "Satan," which stands on the eastern side of the Wadi Mina, an ancient dried-up water-course. The intention in doing so is to display one's hatred of evil and of the Enemy of Mankind. There, also, I sacrificed a goat in accordance with custom. A small portion of the animal's flesh is partaken of, and now I cast from me the white robe of pilgrimage and resumed my ordinary garb. Later I returned to Mecca, and ran once again in the spaces of Safa and Merva, thus acquiring sanctity.

The spirit displayed during the pilgrimage is one of the highest sanctity. An attitude of the most pious devotion is observed by all. Many exhibit signs of the deepest meditation and it is clear that they are engaged in sounding the depths of a mystical rapture which is heightened by the associations of the holy ground on which they find themselves. The spectacle of thousands of people slowly perambulating the sacred spaces of the Holy City, muttering to themselves in prayer or rapt in a profound religious ecstasy, can never be forgotten.

An atmosphere of the most profound gravity hangs over the city during the period of pilgrimage. Diversion of any kind is entirely forbidden by the pious Sultan Ibn Saud, and anything approaching levity of conduct would be most severely checked. But I never witnessed even a hint of such conduct. In Mecca such a thing would be utterly impossible.

In the evenings we walked in the covered bazaars, still warm with the day's heat, and inspected the wares manufactured in the city, the amazingly beautiful silks and wonderful beads, for which it is celebrated; or climbed the adjoining hills by moonlight, and beheld the city, wrapped as in a veil of silver tissue, lying in the hollows beneath, her myriad lights shining mysteriously through the argent haze. It is usual after such a walk to ride home on gaily caparisoned donkeys, whose bells tinkle as they run, for no motor-car is permitted to defile the sacred precincts.

Perhaps the most amazing spectacle I beheld whilst in Mecca was that of thirty thousand Wahabi Arabs of the desert at prayer with their Sultan, Ibn Saud. The ceremony took place at the hottest part of the day, and across the golden sands, burning with the sun's rays, came the deep voice of the warrior-king as he led his subjects in prayer. In and out of the ranks of the Wahabi soldiers passed the long shimmering heat-waves, striking mercilessly on their bronze faces which were raised in supplication to the great wall of rock beyond.

"Meekly do we approach Thee, O the Mightiest of the Mighty," he cried. "Lead us to the path trodden by the faithful and the accepted ones." The prayer rose and fell in tones of powerful appeal, then, as if checked by religious emotion, the Sultan ceased suddenly. A stillness as of death followed in the appalling heat. Then he resumed. "Give us strength, O Allah, to march in Thy way so that we may be of service to Islam." Thirty thousand soldier voices murmured "Amen," and the hills caught the echo of it like distant thunder. For three hours in the merciless sun stood the great commander, his head covered only by a cotton sheet, his hosts at his back, praying in silence, and only the call from the muezzin to the evening's petition dispersed them, and Ibn Saud, Lion of the Desert, was swallowed up in the ranks of his men as they streamed towards the city.

At that moment our caravan departed, and mounting our camels, we moved toward the coast, our hearts full of a holy joy because our pilgrimage had been so blessed

to us. The straggling column slowly threaded the desert, seeming in the moonlight like the writing of a great stylus on the sand—a written benediction from Allah the Compassionate!

As the days pass, the memory of Mecca and the days of devotion spent therein remain in the heart and mind as a sacred emotion of imperishable fragrance, a rose of pious sentiment which the Moslem treasures in his bosom while life lasts. The human pictures which it conjures up are no less unforgettable, the throngs of white-robed pilgrims walking or praying in the fierce blaze of the desert day, the ghostly effect of their myriads in the moon-washed radiance of the Eastern night, the glittering domes of the silver mosques, those hills of prayer, the slender grace of the heaven-piercing minarets, from which the call to communion with Allah sounds with mysterious resonance over the snowy city, echoing in the encircling hills like a voice heard in sleep.

Mecca is, indeed, an alembic in which the amalgam of Moslem opinion is mingled and spiritualized in such a manner that it attains an extraordinary unity of outlook. Here the Arab, the Turk, the Persian, the Afghan, the Indian, the African meet on common ground and leave with a singleness of religious sentiment which causes astonishment in the European. It is the environment that enfolds the Holy City which brings about this sentiment of union in Allah, its traditions, its sanctity, its atmosphere of ancient peace. No man can dwell for a week or so within its borders and not be conscious of an extraordinary uprising of heart. I am afraid I cannot convey to non-Moslems the feelings of rapture with which all good sons of Islam hear the name of Mecca. The Christians of the Middle Ages hailed the name of Jerusalem with affection equal to that with which the Jews now hearken to it. Now they look to Rome or Canterbury. But the Moslem will not alter his allegiance to the metropolis of his faith, for to him the name is as that of an earthly Paradise, a heaven terrestrial, where alone in this troublous world the jewel of peace is to be found.

The Food of Paradise

On the close of my visit to the Holy City Mecca, I joined the caravan of Sheikh Amru, who apart from being a great theological teacher, was a famous narrator of ancient tales. The occasion was when he asked me as to what calling I was going to choose after my wanderings. Somewhat humorously I said that I was going to do nothing for my living, since Allah has promised to feed the Faithful.

"Listen my son," said the Sheikh, as he reclined against his camel's saddle; and then I knew that an ancient tale was to be retailed out to us. This is what he said:

In the school founded by the Caliph for the study of divine things sat the devout Mullah Ibrahim, his hands folded in his lap, in an attitude of meditation. Ibrahim taught students from all the countries of Islam, but the work was thankless and ill-paid. And as he sat there he thought on his state for the first time in many years.

"Why is it," he said to himself, "that a man so holy as I am must toil so hard to instruct a pack of blockheads, when others who have merited nothing through piety or attention to the Commands of Allah fare sumptuously every day and neither toil nor spin? O, Compassionate One, is not this thing unjust? Whereof should Thy servant be burdened, like an ass in the market-place, which carries two panniers both filled to the top and stumbles at every blow of the driver's stick?"

And as he considered, Ibrahim the Wise, as men called him, brought to mind that verse in the Holy Literature in which it says: "Allah will not let any one starve." And taking deeper counsel with himself, he said: "May it not be that those whom I have blamed for their sloth and inactivity are, after all, the better Moslems, that they have greater faith than I? For, perusing this passage, they may have said to themselves: 'I will cast myself upon the mercy of Allah, which in this text is surely extended to all men. Allah in his bounty will surely feed and maintain

me.' Why then toil and strive as the faithless do? It is those who have faith that are the elect."

At that moment a great pasha halted before the gates of the seminary, in his piety alighting from his palanquin to give alms to a beggar, as all good Moslems do. And as Ibrahim watched him through the lattice, he thought: "Does not the condition of the beggar as well as that of this pasha prove the justice of the text upon which I have been meditating? Neither starves, but the wealthier man is assuredly the more devout, for he is the giver and not the receiver, and for this very purpose has been blest with the goods of this world. Why do I hesitate, wretched man that I am? Shall I not, as the Book ordains, cast myself on the bounty of Allah and free myself for ever from the intolerable burden of instructing fools in a wisdom they can never understand?"

So saying, Ibrahim the Sage arose from his place in the College of the Caliph, and walked out of the City of Baghdad where he had dwelt for many years. It was evening, and betaking himself to the banks of the river, he selected a dry and shady spot beneath a spreading cypress tree, and, awaiting the bounty of Allah, fell fast asleep in the certainty that the Lord of all Compassion would not fail him.

When he awoke, it was early morning, and a divine hush lay upon everything. Ibrahim lazily speculated as to the manner in which he would be sustained. Would the birds of the air bring him sustenance, would the fishes from the stream leap ashore, offering themselves for the assuagement of his growing hunger? In what way did those who merited the help of Allah first receive it, if not in some miraculous manner? True, the wealthy were bequeathed riches by their parents. But there must be a beginning. A pasha might sail down the river in his barge and supply his wants out of golden dishes and silver cups.

But morning blossomed into day and day into night and still the miracle remained unaccomplished. More than one pasha glided past him in his gilded barge, but these made only the customary salutations and gave no other sign.

On the road above pilgrims and travellers passed, but without taking the least notice of him. Hunger gnawed at his vitals, and he thought with envy of the millet porridge with goats' milk the mullahs would now be enjoying at the seminary. Still was he trustful, and, as he made the customary ablutions in the river, his faith had abated not one jot.

Again he slept, and once more day dawned in scarlet and silver beauty. By this time he felt so faint as scarcely to be able to stand. The hours crept slowly onward, yet no sign came that his hunger was to be satisfied.

At last, as midday approached with its stifling heat, something floating upon the surface of the water caught his eye. It seemed like a mass of leaves wrapped up with fibre, and wading into the river he succeeded in catching it. Back he splashed with his prize to the bank, and sitting down on the sward, he opened the packet. It contained a quantity of the most delicious-looking *halwa*, that famous marzipan, of the making of which only Baghdad knows the secret, a sweetmeat composed of sugar mingled with paste of almonds and attar of roses and other delicate and savoury essences.

After gorging himself with the delightful fare, Ibrahim the Wise drank deeply from the river, and lolled on the sward, sure that his prayer had been answered, and that he would never have to toil more. There was sufficient of the ambrosial food to serve for three meals a day, and on each day after the hour of midday prayer a similar packet of *halwa* came floating down the stream as though placed there by the hands of angels.

"Surely," said the Mullah, "the promises of Allah are true, and the man who trusts in Him will not be deceived. Truly I did well to leave the seminary, where, day-in, day-out, I had perforce to cram divine knowledge into the heads of idiots incapable of repeating a verse correctly even at the fifteenth attempt."

Months passed, and Ibrahim continued to receive the food that Allah had promised with unfailing regularity. Then, quite naturally, he began to speculate whence it

came. If he could find the spot where it was deposited on the surface of the stream, surely he must witness a miracle, and as he had never done so, he felt greatly desirous of attaining the merit such a consummation would undoubtedly add to his fame as a holy man.

So one morning, after eating the last of the *halwa* he had received on the preceding day, he girded up his loins, and taking his staff, began slowly to walk up-stream. "Now," said he, "if what I suppose be true, I will today receive my luscious food at an earlier hour than usual, as I shall be nearer the place where it is deposited on the water, and indeed on each day I shall receive at an even earlier hour, until at last I come to the spot where some divine seraph, sent by Allah from Paradise, drops the savoury food of heaven upon the stream in justification of my trust in the most Merciful."

For some days Ibrahim walked up-stream, keeping carefully to the bank of the river and fixing his eyes on its surface in case he should fail to discern the packet of *halwa*. But every day at an ever earlier hour, it floated regularly past him, carried by the current so near to the shore that he could easily wade out and secure it. At nights he slept beneath a convenient tree, and as men perceived him to be a mullah and a sacred man, no one thought of molesting him.

It was on the fourth day of his journey that he observed the river had widened. In a large island in the midst of the stream rose a fair castle. The island composed a princely domain of noble meadow-land and rich garden, crossed and interlaced by the silver of narrow streams, and was backed by the blue and jagged peaks of great mountains. The castle itself was built of marble white as sculptured ice, and its green and shady lawns sloped down to a silent and forlorn shore of golden sand.

And when night descended this wondrous region was illuminated by the romance of moonlight into an almost unearthly radiance, so that Ibrahim in all his piety was forced to compare it with Paradise itself. The white castle on its dark rocks seemed like day pedestalled upon

night, and from the sea-green of the shadow of myrtles rose the peaks of pavilions whence came the sound of guitars and lutes and voices more ravishingly sweet than Ibrahim, the son of the seminary, had ever believed earth could hold.

And as Ibrahim gazed spellbound at the wondrous spectacle and drank in the sounds of ecstasy which arose from the garden, wondering whether he were not already dead and in the purlieus of Heaven, a harsh voice hailed him at his very elbow, asking him what he did there. He turned swiftly, to see standing beside him an ancient man in the garb of a hermit, with long matted hair and tangled beard.

"Salaam, good father," he said, much relieved, for, like all men of peace, he feared violence. "The peace of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, be upon you."

"And upon you, my son," replied the anchorite. "But what do you here at this hour of the night, when all such as you should be asleep?"

"Like yourself, I am a holy man," replied Ibrahim, with unction, "but I travel on a quest the nature of which I may not divulge to any. Passing this spot, I was attracted by the unusual appearance of yonder castle and its surroundings, and would learn its history, if that is known to you."

"It is, though in part only," rejoined the hermit, "for I have dwelt many years in this neighbourhood, but have little converse with men. Know, then, that the place you behold is called the Silver Castle. It was built by a pasha now dead, who was greatly enamoured of a certain princess, whose father refused him her hand in marriage. But, not to be gainsaid, so fierce and unruly a thing is love in some men, he built this strength in the midst of the river as you see, and placed upon it so many dark and terrible spells of magic that none could cross to or from it without his sanction. Then, abducting the princess, he espoused her and placed her in yonder tower. The King, her father, came with an army to besiege the place, but so potent

were the necromancies the Pasha had surrounded it with that he was compelled to raise the siege and leave his daughter in the hands of his enemy."

"You amaze me," cried Ibrahim. "And does this princess remain here still?"

"No, brother," replied the Hermit, "like her lord she has passed away, but they have left behind them a daughter who governs the castle, a lady of surpassing beauty, who spends her days in pleasure and in spending the wealth her father bequeathed her. But she has but one sorrow, and that is that none can dissolve the spells woven by her father the Pasha, so that no one may either gain admittance to the castle or leave it. Her companions are therefore either the very aged or those born on the island and no other, which, for a young and beautiful woman, must be wearisome. But you will pardon me, brother, I am going on a pilgrimage to a certain shrine in Baghdad, where I betake myself once a year to acquire merit. Meanwhile, if you choose to rest, you may dwell in my humble cell yonder until I return in seven days' time."

Ibrahim gladly accepted the Hermit's offer, and when he had gone, sat down to ponder over the tale he had told him. Now, among other wisdoms, he had acquired during his years of study a deep knowledge of the magical art, and he bethought him that it might be given to him to rid the castle and its inhabitants of the spells which held them prisoner on the island.

But in the midst of his thoughts he fell asleep, and did not waken until the sun was high in the heavens. Then he made his ablutions, and betook himself to the banks of the river, where he sat and watched the surface of the water for a sign of the appearance of the delicious food he received daily.

And as he watched, he beheld a curious thing. Some three hours before midday a very beautiful woman appeared on the marble battlements which overhung the river. So fair was she that the Mullah gasped with surprise at the radiance of her beauty, which was that of the houris of Paradise. For her hair was as golden wire which is drawn

thin by the cunning of the goldsmith, her eyes were yellow, and bright as topazes found on Mount Ararat, and the colour of her cheeks was as that of the roses of Isfahan. And as for the flesh of her body, it shone with the lustre of silver, so brightly polished it was.

"Can this be the Princess?" thought Ibrahim, or an angel from heaven? Nay, surely it is she, for this woman, though beautiful surpassingly, is still a mortal."

And as Ibrahim stood beholding her, she raised her arm and cast something into the river. And when she had done so, she withdrew from the battlements and disappeared like a planet behind clouds.

The Mullah kept his eyes fixed on that which she had cast into the stream, and in a little perceived that it was the very packet of leaves which he was wont to receive daily. Wading into the stream he secured it, unwrapped it, and found it full of the delicious *halwa*, as usual.

"Ha," said he, as he devoured the savoury sweetmeat. "So now I know at last that radiant being by whose hands Allah, the Just, the Merciful, has ordained I shall be fed daily. Truly, the Compassionate must have put it into the heart of this divine princess to cast this luscious food on the breast of the stream at the self-same hour each day. And shall I not seek to repay her the distinguished kindness she has done me by freeing her from the spells by which she is encompassed, and which keep her a prisoner, she who should be wed to a Sultan at least and should reign in Baghdad itself?"

And with these grateful thoughts, he sat down to consider by what means the spells which surrounded the castle might be broken. And, casting himself into a deep trance, he walked in spirit in the Land of the Jinn, where, as a holy man, he could come to no harm. And coming to the house of one of the Jinn, whom he knew and whose name was Adhem, he summoned him and had speech with him.

"Hail, holy man," said Adhem, making low obeisance. "I am your servant. In what way can I serve you?"

Ibrahim acquainted him with the reason for his presence

there, at which the Jinn assumed an air of the greatest concern.

"What you ask is indeed hard, most wise Ibrahim," he said doubtfully. "But I will take counsel of my brethren on the matter without delay, and shall let you know the result of our deliberations by a speedy and trusty messenger. No more can I say or do at present."

With this Ibrahim departed and soon after awoke from his trance. He seemed only to have been an hour in the Land of the Jinn, but it must have been five hours or more, for the sun was high in the heavens when he fell asleep, and now moonlight was sparkling on the waters of the river. And the same exquisite music he had heard before arose from the gardens of the castle, as though from the lips of peris.

And as Ibrahim listened entranced, a shape scarcely more solid than the moonlight rose slowly out of the river and stood before him in the shadowy likeness of a jinn. Three times it made obeisance before him, then it spoke.

"Most wise and holy Ibrahim," it said, "my master Adhem, a prince among the people of the Jinn, has sent me to acquaint you with the decision of his counsellors. They proffer you this ring set with the diamond which men call adamant, and in whose shining surface if you will gaze, you shall behold the nature of those spells which keep the Princess and her train prisoners in yonder castle. And, having discovered the nature of those spells, if you summon our people to your aid in such shapes as will dissolve or break them they will come in such guise as will set the Princess free."

With those words the Jinn vanished into the river whence he had come. And, without delay, Ibrahim took the ring which the spirit had cast on the grass at his feet, and peered into the shining stone it held.

And straightway he beheld the first spell. Close to the shore of the river arose a mighty bastion as of stone, invisible to mortal eyes, which surrounded the castle from shore to shore. And Ibrahim summoned to him the hosts

of the Jinn in the guise of sappers, with picks and hammers, and on this wall they fell mightily in their myriads, so that without sound or clamour of any sort, they reduced it to dust ere a man could count a hundred.

Then Ibrahim looked once more in the surface of the diamond, and saw a great web like that of a spider hanging in the air round the castle. And he summoned the hosts of the Jinn in the shape of eagles, which so rent at the invisible web with their strong beaks that in less time than it takes to tell of it, almost, it fell in fragments into the stream.

Once more Ibrahim gazed into the stone, and this time he saw an army of viewless giants, with spear and scimitar in hand, drawn up in array of war on the shores of the island. And he called the Jinn people to him in the likeness of greater and more powerful giants, who did battle with those on the island. Terrible was the strife, and Ibrahim trembled mightily as he watched it. But soon the Jinn prevailed over the giants of the island, and put them to flight.

The spells which had surrounded the castle were now removed, and as day had dawned, Ibrahim cast about for some means of reaching the castle. No sooner had he wished this than by the power of the Jinn a bridge rose out of the stream by which he was enabled to cross to the island. And when he had done so, he was accosted by an old man who held a bared scimitar in his hand, and who asked him by what means he had been enabled to reach the island, which had so long been under enchantment.

"That I may tell only to your lady, the Princess," said Ibrahim. "Admit me to her presence without delay."

The guard, marvelling, ushered him through the great gate of the castle, and across a spacious court where fountains sang mellifluously. Entering a magnificent hall, the floor of which was inlaid with squares of blue and white marble and the walls with lapis lazuli and other rare stones, he gave the Mullah into the keeping of a black eunuch, who requested the holy man to follow him.

Upon a dais sat the incomparable Princess whom Ibrahim

had beheld on the battlements, and who daily cast the packet of *halwa* on the waters of the river. To her the Mullah made obeisance, and, kneeling before her, told his tale.

"And what, most wise Ibrahim, do you ask in recompense of your so notable offices on my behalf?" asked the Princess. "Speak, and it shall be granted to you, even to the half of my inheritance."

"Nay, noble lady," exclaimed Ibrahim. "For have I not reason enow to be grateful to your Highness for the delicious food with which you have fed me daily? That *halwa* which you cast every morning from the battlements, and which has floated down the stream I have eaten with thankfulness. Surely only an angel from Paradise could have put it into your heart to despatch it."

The Princess blushed so deeply that her heightened colour could be seen even beneath her veil.

"Alas, good Mullah!" she cried, wringing her hands. "What is this you tell me? Curses on the day on which I first cast that *halwa* as you call it, on the waters of the river. Know, that each morning it is my custom to take a bath of milk, after which I anoint and rub my limbs with essence of almonds, sugar and sweet-scented cosmetics. These, then, I remove from my nakedness and, wrapping them in leaves, cast them into the stream."

"Ah, now, Princess, I see who has been blind," cried Ibrahim, with a wry countenance. "Allah surely gives food to everyone; but its quality and kind are dictated by what man deserves!"

The Sheikh, the Sun and the Sack

Journeying up the northern deserts of Arabia, our caravan was divided into two parts. Mullah Amru took his men towards Iraq, whilst I trekked with the rest to Syrian tracts. Now, in travelling like this, one has one great advantage—that of meeting all sorts of men; holy men, literary men, pious men and even the brigand chief with a will to reform. Of the latter kind was a dare-devil Kurd, who was supposed to be trading in Damascus silk.

I wanted to follow the Mullah Amru as well into Iraq, and as my reason, I mentioned that thus possibly I might get more thrill out of travelling—when travelling does not mean arriving, but merely moving from place to place.

If you want real thrills, he said, go to Jebel-es-Sharki; wherever that is. That decidedly was the spot, he thought. I mentioned the cowboy adventures of America. Cowboys! Cowboys; well, you can take it from me that they are a poor substitute for camel-boys. Then he related his latest adventures:

On this particular trip, he said, I was the guest of a Sheikh. I would not mention his name. It will not be safe for you, for he shoots before speaking. He was a good enough host though; his whole camel-hair tent and his entire rations were placed at my disposal, for the Arab hospitality is proverbial. He had only one joke, this Sheikh. "Ah, you Ajami," he would say. For the rest of the world is Ajam, which is not Arab. He would show a tooth like a jackal's and laughed at the idea that we Kurds could be of any use to the world. It seemed to afford him the greatest amusement, and sometimes his giggles lasted for hours.

We Afghans have a "rep" in the East, I'll admit. There is a Persian proverb: "In a row look for an Afghan." I suppose you would call us the Irish of the Orient.

I met the Sheikh in the queerest way. I was riding camel-back from Maabilah, hoping to make Baalbec. I am not going to hand you out the old mossy tale about an

78 eclipse of the sun, but it *did* just happen that one came along that very afternoon, and I was as ignorant of its incidence as anyone in the Jebel-es-Sharki.

A shadow like the edge of a big bad penny began to creep across the disk of day. Of course, I saw at once what it was, and cursed. The beastly thing would last for over a couple of hours, and, as it threatened to grow pitch dark, I would perforce have to dismount. Hard cheese, when I had figured to be at Baalbec by five o'clock and do most of my prospecting in the cool of the evening.

Suddenly a bombardment like a second-class battle commenced to the south of me. On the other side of one of the big sandhills men were shooting like mad, and giving vent to the most bloodthirsty yells.

With the proverbial curiosity of my race, I spurred my heri to the top of the mound and looked down. Some half-dozen Arabs were blazing away at the sky. On seeing me they stopped and, jumping on their camels, rode quickly to the summit of the rise.

"What are you firing at?" I asked. "Aeroplane?"

"No, no," irritably shouted a big man whom I took for the leader. "Can't you see? Sheitan, he's swallowing the sun. We're firing at him to make him stop."

"Waste of powder, my friend," I laughed. "There's no Sheitan there. It's only an eclipse and you know what that is, don't you?"

"If you're trying to hocus me with any of your modern stuff," he shouted, "you'll better think again, for I'm not having any."

"If that's Sheitan," I asked, pointing to the now very apparent shadow on the luminary, "where are his teeth? And how comes it that his mouth is convex? You *are* duffers, you desert Arabs. Can't you see that's only the shadow of the moon? It'll disappear in an hour or two, as it always does. Surely you've seen an eclipse before without making all this hullabaloo about it?"

"Of course we've seen it before," answered the Sheikh; "but in other cases it only disappeared because we fired at it."

And " suiting the action to the word," as the old story-spinners used to say, he raised his long rifle and banged away at the orb of day, followed by his faithful servitors.

" How many millions of miles off do you think it is? " I asked. " Easy to see you never got *The Story of the Heavens* as a school prize"

But I let them carry on without further argument, for, thinking of my own personal safety, I concluded it would be just as well that they should exhaust their ammunition.

This they very soon did, while the light faded into almost total darkness. When they had expended their last bullets the chief turned to me.

" Fire, can't you," he commanded, but I shook my head.

" We're economical folk, we Kurdish Persians," I said. " I'm not wasting any Browning bullets on Old Man Sol."

" So you're an Irani? " laughed the Sheikh. " Of course that explains a lot. Where are you bound for? "

" Baalbec. I'm going to write about it."

This statement was greeted with respectful silence. The desert Arab has an enormous veneration for anyone who can write. To him even the act of caligraphy has a savour of the magical.

" We are going in that very direction," said the Sheikh. " You will not, however, reach Baalbec tonight, for there are bandits in the pass. But I can offer you entertainment. Even if you are an Ajami you're a Moslem, ha, ha, ha! Come along."

As I was the only man there with any ammunition I didn't mind " coming along," but I resolved to keep my eyes skinned, for the gang looked rather a leery lot, and I didn't particularly want to wake up with the Sign of the Crescent across my throat. We rode for miles in almost absolute silence over the sands and gradually the light returned. At length, we came to a fairly large encampment, which seemed to consist chiefly of tents, goats and smell, where a few dirty children were playing about. All the women had vanished on our arrival.

We dismounted and the Sheikh conducted me to his tent. " Conducted " is good, for in reality we had to

crawl into it. His harem was divided from the living apartment by a screen of filthy haircloth swarming with flies, but he ordered some quite passable coffee from a black slave, and handed me a *chibouk* filled with excellent Anatolian tobacco.

"Listen," he said, "when you depart on the morrow I want you to do me a favour."

I indicated that I would be happy to oblige him, if it wasn't anything too embarrassing.

"It's just to carry a sack of corn to a friend of mine at the mouth of the pass," he assured me with a wink.

"Sack of corn, eh?" I laughed. "Hasn't your friend any breadstuffs of his own? What's all the mystery about, anyhow?"

The Sheikh laughed too. "Oh you Ajami," he roared, "you are such funny fellows."

"Someone's told you that twenty years ago and you've evidently never got over it," I said rudely, for all this jeering at my race was beginning to get on my nerves. "Come across now with that idea, or count me out."

"It's all right, brother," he giggled. "Don't get angry. Now, see here. Karim, the son of my friend the Sheikh Abdul, got lost in the desert, and he offered a reward of two camels for the boy's recovery. I have found the boy. The camels came to hand yesterday morning. Naturally I must now send the imp of Eblis back to his sire."

"But why in a sack?" I asked.

"Well, if he's not tied up, he'd jump off your animal at once, you see. Will you do it?"

"Well, since you've given me your hospitality I can't refuse, can I? All the same I don't much like the job. Looks as though you'd kidnapped the little beggar yourself."

"It's really nothing," he assured me, "just carrying a sack on the hind-hump of your heri for an hour or two. I'll ride to the top of the pass with you in the morning to make sure the bandits have gone."

We ate, and after more coffee and tobacco, went to bed, or what passes for "bed" in an Arab tent. I knew only too well that I need take not the slightest risk in sleeping

soundly under Arab "canvas," for no race obeys the laws of hospitality with greater rigour. I dozed off almost at once, and must have been asleep for several hours, when I was rudely awakened by the sound of a shot at close quarters.

"What in the name of Allah . . .?" I began, sitting up quickly enough.

"It's all right," barked the Sheikh. "That infernal slave of mine, son of Eblis, tried to bag your spy-glasses, and I shot him, that's all. It's a pity, for he made such good coffee."

"Good heavens," I cried, "you don't mean to say you shot the poor devil for that? Where is he?"

"Just outside," laughed the Sheikh. "Oh, you Iranis, you are funny people."

I dragged the unfortunate nigger in and found he was slightly wounded in the leg. I bound it up as well as I could in the circumstances, while he yelled and groaned in the most pitiful way.

There wasn't much more sleep that night, for the Sheikh kept me awake with his laughter at the vagaries of the Kurds. Why on earth should anyone worry about a slave or two? He passed from one fit of cachinnation to another. And then he began to snore, giggling every now and again in his sleep.

At last came daybreak and I made a job of the slave's leg and left him some dressings and antiseptic, which he promised in a bewildered sort of way to use. Then we breakfasted, and the Sheikh produced the boy whom I was to take to his father at the mouth of the pass in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains.

When I saw the young shaver I had misgivings. A few hours later, how I wished I had never set eyes on him!

"It is seven miles to the mouth of the pass," said the Sheikh, "and it's now bandit-proof, as I've ascertained. All the same, you'd better keep under the shadow of the hillside as much as possible. Got everything you want?"

"As man to man, Sheikh," I asked, "is there any catch

in this? You know I rather feel it in my bones that something's wrong."

"I assure you, that everything's straight and above board," replied the Sheikh, looking me fairly between the eyes. "It is not in my heart to lie to you."

"Well, I'll take your word for it, although I know what liars you desert Arabs are," I said; "but, remember, if there's any hanky-panky about this I'll come back—and I won't come back alone."

For answer the Sheikh merely spread out his hands in a deprecating gesture. I kicked my camel in the ribs and started, the sack, with boy complete, bobbing and jumping at my rear.

We hadn't gone half a mile when that infernal young limb of Sheitan began to make such a hubbub that I was compelled to stop. He yelled like a stuck pig, but what he said I couldn't hear, for the sack veiled his utterance almost completely.

"Look here, my young friend," I shouted vigorously, shaking the bundle in which he was tied, "stop that song and dance inside there, or I'll chuck you off and leave you to be eaten by the vultures."

This speech drew a louder howl than ever, although never a word could I make out of what the brat said—I knew why later. But resolving to take no notice, I rode on. I quickly covered the two or three leagues to the mouth of the pass, which, as the Sheikh had assured me, seemed to have not a single bandit left in its bounds, and came, rather too suddenly for me, on the "village" of the local big-wig Abdul, whose son and heir I was convoying home.

And only then did it strike me—dolt that I had been! —how queer it was that I should have to deliver him in a sack!

Alas, it was too late to retrace my tracks, for just as the oddity of the thing struck me, a round dozen of Arabs suddenly appeared as if from the sand, and surrounded me.

"What do you want here, Effen'?" asked one, who

evidently took me for a Turk, "you can't collect taxes nowadays, you know."

Nothing doing in that way, brother," I said as cheerily as I could, "I've brought the Sheikh's son home. Can I see His Worship at once?"

It wasn't necessary to inquire further. At that moment the Sheikh Abdul came running out of his tent. I introduced myself with all the formality suitable to such an occasion, and told him my errand. In another ten seconds he was pulling at the goatskin thongs which bound up the mouth of the sack, blaspheming lustily the while and muttering endearments.

"Karim, jewel of the desert," he cried, "hast thou then returned to thy father at last? And wherefore has this monster of cruelty brought thee back to me in a foul sack, smelling of the produce of the Feringhees? Rest assured that he shall suffer for the affront, my little star, my lambkin."

Now this didn't sound any too reassuring, and I began to finger my Browning. If there was going to be trouble, I should get in on the ground floor.

"Sheikh Abdul," I said, "I'm merely a messenger. I had nothing to do whatever with the affair, I . . ."

"Hold thy peace," cried Abdul in a white fury. "Do you see those black flags fluttering on the sandhills yonder?"

"Aye, Sheikh, I see them. What of them?"

"What of them! He asks 'what of them'," howled Abdul, tugging at the thongs in a frenzy. "Here, Turk, thy knife."

"With pleasure, Sheikh, but I'm no Turk. I'm a Kurd."

"A wha-a-t?" bellowed the Sheikh, "a Kurd did you say?"

That seemed to have torn it.

"What's the matter?" I asked lamely.

"He asks what's the matter?" screamed Abdul. "Look, dog, see the black flags?"

"Less of that dog stuff," I growled, drawing my Browning. "You're behaving like a fool, Sheikh. I don't get you at all."

"The black flags," murmured one of the 'suite',

" mean that the Sheikh's beautiful daughter was abducted yesterday. Unhappily, the abductor chanced to be a Kurd."

" And if one camel bites you, do you thrash another camel? " I asked sententiously, for I knew well that it is just that kind of second-hand argument which goes down with the desert Arabs.

But my old-time illustration was drowned in a series of maledictions, for by this time the Sheikh had unbound the mouth of the sack and had drawn forth its occupant who had been gagged. Howls rent the air.

" By all the fiends in Eblis," yelled the Sheikh, " this is not Karim."

" Not . . . your son ! " I cried in a strangled voice.

" That spawn of a spavined dromedary my son ! " spluttered Abdul. " Seize that robber of children."

" Look here, Sheikh," I said, brandishing my pistol, " I can make every allowance for your grief and disappointment as a father, but if you try on any funny business, you're apt to swallow some sand. Now, look here. If you'll return with me to the home of your kidnapping neighbour, we'll soon put things to rights. Your boy is bound to be in his encampment."

" I'm going there at once," replied the Sheikh with horrid calm, " as soon as I've impaled you and this devil's offspring here."

" Oh, if it's like that," I said sternly, " let's begin the impaling now. But there'll be some plugging first."

Abdul looked somewhat alarmed. " Be it as you say," he croaked angrily, " but if I do not recover my son, beware."

We mounted, with the yelling brat before me, and sped up the pass again. And, believe me, none there was so anxious to interview the Sheikh as myself.

In little more than an hour our fast-trotting camels carried us over the rocky road. We were just in time, for the Sheikh and his henchmen were in the very act of striking camp as we dashed up.

" Accursed," yelled Abdul, " where is my son? "

" Produce that boy," I shouted, handing him the counter-

feit monkey, " or, by Sheitan, it's your last morning, you dirty kidnapper."

The Sheikh looked dazed. " What's the matter? " he said in amazement. " I don't know what you're talking about. Put away that gun, Kurd. I don't like the look of it."

Abdul hurled himself upon the Sheikh, and seized him by the throat. The pair rolled over and over in the sand, to the shrieks and war-cries of their followers.

" Get up," I said, " and listen to reason. Sheikh, where is Abdul's boy? Produce him at once, you wretched double-crosser—and the girl as well."

" The girl! " moaned the Sheikh, nursing his left eye, in which Abdul had inserted a probing thumb. " I can give you the boy, but there's no girl here."

" Liar," I said quietly. " You pinched Abdul's daughter yesterday and had it put about last night that I had done the job. So that's why you giggled in your sleep last night, eh? Now bring them both here before I start shooting."

Sulkily the Sheikh ambled to his tent, and after fumbling in the women's quarters, reappeared, driving before him a boy of some seven years and a girl about sixteen. They at once ran to Abdul, who embraced them rapturously. Then he turned to the Sheikh.

" Jinn of the sand-hills," he hissed, " where are the camels I sent you? "

" The camels," said the Sheikh lamely, " did you send camels? Well, I suppose they'll be with the herd. I must be going. Business is slack about here."

" Take this with you," I said, kicking him in the proper place with my heavy riding-boot. " And please understand that next time you meet a Kurd you can't do him down as you tried to do me."

As we rode off, a bullet or two whizzed past. I replied with my Browning, but the firing soon ceased.

The Sheikh turned to me. " Kurd," he said with a noble air, " you are a hero. How I have misjudged you! But, to make amends, I shall bestow upon you my daughter's hand."

" Sorry, Abdul," I replied, " but I am already married."

"But do the Kurds not have more than one wife?" he asked in amazement.

"Not if we can help it," I assured him. "It's kind of you, very thoughtful indeed, but I must be getting on to Baalbec."

"To Baalbec! But there's nothing doing there."

"There's the ruins—nice quiet spot."

"The ruins!" murmured the Sheikh. "Allah be good to him, for the poor Kurd is crazy after all!"

But not till this soldier of fortune related to me the life-story of Suleiman did I know that he belonged to the family of that brigand chief who gave the old Persian Government many sleepless nights.

A Woman is but a Man's Shadow

Although merely a hillman's story, yet nothing portrays the mind of a warrior Kurd more than this does, so I give it as related, a good comparison with the peaceful, almost docile temperaments of the Persians. It is the story of a Kurdish brigand; and although old in age, it might well be true to the conditions of today where no law but trigger law is obeyed on the frontier of Persia:

By no stretch of even the most romantic imagination, said my Kurdish guide, could the cavern of Suleiman, the brigand, be described as befitting its reputation. It was small, dark and decidedly damp, yet in this sordid den the predatory chieftain with whose name northern Persia rang, took such ease as he permitted himself.

It was a dismal afternoon in the rainy season. The wind wailed outside through the screen of stunted pines which faced the cave, and blew the smoke of the tiny fire which burned at its entrance over the head and shoulders of the bandit, so that it seemed as a veil round the torso of a mysterious prophet.

What Suleiman was actually doing it would be hard to say. Ask what a statue is engaged in, and you probably have the reply. He might have been sleeping, he might have been thinking. But when the noise of footsteps on the twig-strewn path without crackled to his hearing, he became sufficiently alive, and raised a bearded and hawk-nosed face out of the folds of a huge camel-hair cloak.

A woman stood by the fire, veiled, and as motionless as himself. Such visits were more than infrequent in Suleiman's experience. He had not set eyes on a female form for quite a quarter of a year, yet he remained immovable. It was his invariable custom to permit visitors the first move.

"You are Suleiman?" the lady asked, keeping her face veiled.

The brigand bowed. "You have come to ransom someone?" he asked carelessly, "the tea merchant, perhaps?"

The shrouded form swayed a little. "No, I come on quite another errand," was the reply. "I have heard that

Suleiman occasionally assists those in distress. Is it not so?"

"Such has happened," admitted the brigand.

"Ah, but this time there is no possibility of refusal," cried the veiled lady urgently. "Suleiman has been branded as a coward, will he accept the dishonour?"

Suleiman leapt to his feet, an oath on his bearded lips. Every man has his limit of endurance, and he had never in his life been taunted with cowardice. The experience was a strange one and his blood burned to liquid flame. In a couple of strides he crossed to where his visitor stood swaying, and with a single action he tore the veil from her head. It revealed a vision of terrified beauty at which he stepped back amazed—great luminous eyes gleaming in a face of golden fairness, quivering lips of loveliness, a mass of wavy hair. But frightened as she was, the lady still evidently retained sufficient courage to go through with her mission.

"That has touched you, Suleiman the Black," she laughed "You may think me a fool to brave you in your fastness, but my brother is a prisoner—and what will a true woman not do for her brother?"

"You speak in riddles," growled Suleiman. "Come to the point."

"My brother, the Sirdar Giafar, is, or was, a general in the army of the Shah, you have heard of him. The rebels have taken him prisoner. They have not only loaded him with chains, and treated him foully, but have accused him of cowardice, saying that his defeat was due to panic. He was inconsolable at the charge, and in his wrath has flung to them a challenge. He has undertaken if they set him free, to capture you single-handed—that is, unless you prefer to come down under safe conduct to Tehran and face him sword in hand, as man to man."

Suleiman stared. Then he laughed, loud and long.

"The impertinence of your proposal is amazing," he cried at last. "Am I to be the fool of any soldier who desires to vindicate his honour?"

"You recognize the alternative?" said the woman scathingly. "You will be branded as a coward through the

length and breadth of Persia. How will Suleiman the Black relish such a reputation?"

"After all, I am a bandit, one who lives on plunder. Should I prevail, what is my reward?"

"The reward," answered the woman dully, "is myself, for so I have agreed with my brother. Will not that suffice?"

Suleiman the Black halted in his prowling gait. "Truly," he said, not without admiration, "you must love your brother. But, foolish one, what is to prevent me from keeping you here if I wish, which, by the way, I have no particular desire to do?"

"Your manhood," was the curt reply, "which I am confident even a Suleiman has not altogether lost. Your answer?"

Suleiman laughed once more, shortly this time. "You have won," he said. "I shall go with you to the capital and shall fight the Sirdar Giafar."

Tehran at the commencement of the year 1700 was by no means the Tehran of the Shah of today. Its old-time atmosphere pervaded it. The schools and colleges were unknown, the aerodrome was not there, no Ministries teemed with up-to-date officials in European dress. Instead the spirit of the backward East was triumphant. Long-robed mullahs and bearded tribesmen in turban and sheepskin took the place of smart artillerymen and citizens ill at ease in lounge suits.

Said, the general of the then Shah, might confidently be described as of the older school. As he sat sipping coffee with kalyan at full blast, he would have provided an excellent study for an artist in search of a human example of the unchanging East. Squatting on a cushion, he seemed to sleep rather than to live. It was only in the midst of battle that he ever really woke up. Even at the subsequent division of loot he appeared somnolent, though no one ever dreamed of cheating him. That would have been about as sensible as to snatch a lamb from the jaws of a tiger. But now he was to receive news which would galvanize him sufficiently.

"Sirdar—my father," said one approaching him with a

low salaam, "the Lady Kulsum, sister of Giafar, has returned bringing with her Suleiman the Black."

The mouthpiece of his kalyan fell from Said's bearded lips. "By the hoof of the Father of Evil!" he cried, "but a strange thing has come to pass. That the wolf of the hills should descend to the city." And Said marvelled the more, because, he, too, had been a brigand. "Bring them before me," he commanded.

They came, lady and bandit, the one closely veiled, as the new-old order provided, the other grave but not unsmiling. They stood before Said in silence.

"Suleiman," rasped the General, "what is this? Know you what you do?"

"She who is with me has told me all," replied the bandit. "I fight with Giafar. Should I conquer she falls to my lot, should I fall . . ."

"Then a brigand has his pride?" laughed Said very sourly.

"My lord should know," answered Suleiman with an obeisance. "When do I fight Giafar?"

"At once, if you so choose," grunted the General. "And you have the right to make conditions. You have been branded as a coward, a serious charge for a Persian. Will you fight on foot or on horseback, with tulwars or with the long rifle?"

"With the tulwar and on horseback," said the brigand roughly. "Bring forth your defeated enemy, and let us see what sort of a man has dared to dub Suleiman the Black as a poltroon."

If the city had seemed somnolent when Suleiman and the Lady Kulsum entered it, it grew lively enough when the news that a combat was impending gained currency. Thousands gathered on the broad green space without the gates, and it was all that a strong guard of Said's irregulars could do to prevent the mob from swarming over the field.

At last the combatants appeared. Suleiman on a tall white Arab, silent, confident in poise, Giafar on a bright bay in the uniform of the Shah's army, broad-chested, yet

elegant. Both reined their steeds before the seat of Said the General.

"This," boomed Said sententiously, "is a combat of honour. The ex-General Giafar, accused of cowardice, has offered to free himself from the charge by fighting the brigand Suleiman, whom men call 'the Invincible,' and whose courage none has ever questioned. The combat is, therefore, bound to be one to the death. Let it commence forthwith."

At the word the combatants wheeled their horses, rode some fifty yards from the General's seat, and, setting spurs, dashed at each other. Clashing, their tulwars met in the air like silver streaks, and playing lightly above their heads in fantastic radiance in the afternoon sunlight. Suleiman sat his saddle easily, like a cavalier, the Sirdar Giafar, more heavily, as a trained horseman, yet doggedly, rising now and then for the vantage of the stroke. Round and round each other they circled, neither having the advantage, each fencing for an opening. Then the Sirdar's tulwar fell like the beak of a hawk, and a thin stream of blood trickled down the bandit's left arm. The crowd shouted.

"A shrewd stroke," muttered Said, like a connoisseur, "had it been the sword arm . . ."

The brigand chief gave back, drawing careful rein, evidently heeding not at all his hurt. Then suddenly he charged, smote, and Sirdar Giafar rolled from the saddle, an ugly gash on his brow. He staggered, wiped his forehead with a gilded sleeve, and, on foot as he was, rushed at his adversary, his teeth clenched, his eyes gleaming through the blood which poured down his face.

But Suleiman spurred and avoided him, then springing from his horse, advanced to meet him. That both men were sorely hurt was obvious to the onlookers. Said glanced at the Lady Kulsum, who, still closely veiled, stood silent and statuesque.

"Now," said Suleiman to himself, as he warded off the blows of the bleeding Sirdar. "What does the woman wish? Truly there is no comprehending women. If I kill her brother she will detest me. If I allow him to kill me, she

will remember me as a weakling. Which is the worst ! The curse of Sheitan on it, but I cannot get those eyes of hers out of my head. Bah, I must resort to an ancient trick."

The tulwars met, clashed, and Giafar's fell, his right hand with it, severed at the wrist by a single sweeping back-blow. His sleight of swordsmanship had served Suleiman well.

That evening, with safe conduct, the brigand and the Lady Kulsum rode out of Tehran. When at last the guards left them Suleiman turned to her.

" You seem displeased, lady," he said with a grave smile. " Yet I did what a man might in the circumstances, I saved the life of your brother, mine own honour and his. What would you ? Now I offer you your freedom. Go back to him if you will."

" I do not break my word," she replied sombrely. " A woman has her honour, too. I am willing to pay the price."

" I am a bandit," replied Suleiman, " not a torturer. You are free to return to your kinsman."

" To an armless man ! " she retorted.

" All the more reason why you should return to him," said the brigand roughly. " You will provide him with hands."

They rode on in silence for some time. It was sunset, the shadows of night were gathering.

" Perhaps," said the Lady Kulsum, " perhaps I do not wish to return to Tehran."

" Woman," murmured Suleiman, as if to himself, " is, after all, but the shadow of man. Where he is there must she be also, and the greater the man, the greater she, the shadow."

At this the Lady Kulsum seemed strangely agitated.

" Truly," she said haughtily, " that man has need of all his manliness who wears his bugle by his side and blows it often to arouse his own courage, to awake his belief in himself. That, at least, Giafar never did."

" Bah ! " chuckled Suleiman with a sour smile, " now that he hath no hand to raise his bugle . . ."

" Coward," she flashed, " to belittle a better man, whom, after all, you conquered by a brigand's trick of fence."

"Silence!" hissed Suleiman, "you are now my slave, and impertinence in a brigand's slave is usually punished by the lash."

Kulsum grew pale. "What mean you?" she asked incredulously. "The lash!"

"Ayem the lash, which your handless brother could not give you." Suleiman was very harsh now. "A daily dose of that . . ."

"Oh," cried she, reining in, "this is intolerable. I believed you to be a cavalier at least, if an untamed one. But I find you only a brute. I shall return to Tehran.

"Not so," and Suleiman caught her bridle. "You have made your bed and you must lie thereon. Another word, woman, and I lay my whip across your back."

On and on they rode, now through the darkness of the night. The blackness of a deep donga loomed before them.

"I shall ride on in front a little," he announced. "This donga is dangerous, for the chief who guards it has no compunction regarding travellers, be they merchant or bandit. Follow me."

He pressed forward into the darkness, and when he had ridden some fifty yards, halted and waited. He did not hear the Lady Kulsum following. Indeed, he heard the noise of a horse galloping quickly away in the opposite direction.

Suleiman rose in his stirrups and laughed a great laugh. "It is well," he said, "the Imams know I did not want her. They are all the same. Throw them one kind word, and they will follow you to Sheol, but growl at them . . ."

And, well content, he cantered back to his cavern. The fire was lit, and, weary, he cast himself on a couch of dry grass.

He was on the verge of sleep, when he heard someone clamber up the slope. Rising, he sought the entrance and looked out into the night. Kulsum stood before him. He uttered an exclamation.

"You!" he said.

"Yes, lord. You are right. Woman is but the shadow of man."

The brigand cursed heartily. "I wished you away," he foamed, "so I dissembled. Know that I could not chasten you if I would. I am not the savage you think me. Begone, return to Tehran, for, verily I have played a part, have lied to you, because I would be alone."

"It is not good that you should be alone," she said decidedly, "for a shadowless man is a man bewitched, so I shall stay here. In Tehran there is nothing for me, for after all, I am of the old time, and hate the veiled cities. And the spirit of woman craves for the wild. I shall cook your food and care for your wants, my lord," and she made obeisance to him.

"Now," said Suleiman to himself, "this is my punishment, but, by my guardian angel, it is much too severe." And aloud he said, "As thou wilt, woman, but I pray you, be gentle with my belongings here, nor disturb this place any more than the devil which possesses all women tempts thee to do."

And the Lady Kulsum, glancing round at the confusion of the cavern, smiled the age-long smile of woman, which is the doom of such comfortable confusion.

The Pulse of the Princess Banu

From the region of the Arabian holiness, which the deserts unquestionably are, I besought the cool glades of Persian rose gardens in quest of other shrines. Once in Persia, one feels to be in a different world, and here in the soft breezes of old Iran, one realizes why the Arab more or less looks down upon the Persian for his "soft ways of living" as the sons of the desert call it. And here in the Shrine of Meshad, pilgrims of the Shia world as we were, I had a very happy time amongst the many pilgrim dervishes. The one specially in my mind is an old Hakim, a doctor of medicine, from the ancient city of Bokhara in Turkestan; who, having performed the pilgrimage thrice, was wending his way to his native city. He related of his grandfather, a Hakim, too, of great medical knowledge.

"Piety," said the First Imam, "does not always bring pleasure in its train, else would our serene Sultan be the most happy of men."

"You say truly," replied the Second Imam, "for who can doubt that the Sultan Sunjar is a just and upright Prince. Yet he is doleful, and, since he made the journey to the Shrines of Khaja Bahauddin in Bokhara, he has surely been the saddest among the rulers of the earth."

"It was not always so," said the First Imam, "We can remember when the Court was blithe enough, and when music and festivity reigned within its walls from morning to night. They say that the Sultan is sad because the Princess Banu, his only daughter, suffers from an unknown and may be an incurable malady."

And so it was most surely. Some strange sickness which could not be defined had seized upon the Princess. Her face, once the most beautiful in the world, had grown thin and grey, her eyes had lost their lustre, her brow, once smooth as an unruffled lake, was furrowed with lines of care. Many hakims, or physicians from many countries had tried to cure the Princess of her malady, but all had failed. The ailment from which she suffered seemed beyond the wisdom of physicians to cure.

And Sultan Sunjar, as his daughter drooped as a fading lily on its stalk, grew more harsh and tyrannical every day. So often had he been disappointed by the quacks who swarmed to the Court to try to cure the Princess Banu, that he swore a great oath that any who now sought to do so must take his life in his hand. To him who succeeded in freeing the Princess from the malady which was gradually destroying her, he promised anything he should ask, even to the half of his kingdom. But, did he fail to perform a cure, he would be put to death, and his head would be placed on a spear above the gate of the city.

Now, at the time at which this story commences, the city gate had as many heads rotting on its summit as there were bricks in its fabric, so that strangers arriving at the place and seeing the hakims' turbans from a distance thought that a great meeting of physicians was being held on the broad roof of the gate. And the Princess grew weaker each day.

But one morning a stranger, rather shabbily attired, landed at the port of the city, a little aged-seeming man with white elf-locks and bent shoulders, wrapped up in a great robe of faded green. His pointed nose and slant eyes gave him somewhat the appearance of a ferret, and men naturally avoided him. He called himself Shadrach the Physician, and requested an immediate audience of the Sultan.

It chanced that the Sultan was in anything but a placid frame of mind that morning, and when it was announced to him that one calling himself Shadrach the Physician desired audience of him, he roared like a lion in his wrath.

"Another of those empirics!" he cried. "Well, bring the wretch before me. But if he cannot cure my daughter, and that almost immediately, give him to know that his head will join the others above the city gate."

So Shadrach was admitted. He made low obeisance, but showed no signs of fear when the Sultan assured him of speedy death did he fail in his intention.

"My head, O Pillar of the Universe," he said meekly, "sits very securely on my shoulders, and unless I greatly err it shall remain there. May I behold the Princess?"

The Princess Banu was brought to him. She seemed pale as ivory as she disposed herself on the steps of her father's throne which were covered with the choicest carpets from Isfahan. The Hakim might not address the Princess, but seating himself beside her, he held her wrist beneath his thumb and finger to take the beat of her pulse. And then, to the amazement of the Sultan and all his court, he began to tell her stories. At first he told her tales of the lives of kings and sultans, stories of adventure by land and sea, of battles and of kingdoms lost and won.

But, as he proceeded, never once did the pulse of the Princess flicker or betray the least emotion on her part. Then the Hakim told her tales the most surprising of hidden treasure, of caves in which bandits had secreted their ill-gotten gains, of jewels buried with dead queens and recovered again after generations of searching, yet, never the slightest tremor he felt in the pulse he so carefully tested. The blood in the heart-vein flowed on slowly like the progress of a river in summer, stagnant from the absence of rain.

Then he spoke of his travels. He told her of his sojourn in all the adjacent lands—In India, Persia, Arabia. Still the pulse ran smoothly. But when he spoke of Bokhara, which the Princess had recently visited in the company of her father, her pulse gave a great leap, and a thin mantling of blood suffused her pale cheeks.

"Ha," thought the Hakim. "So the mention of Bokhara agitates her?"

So he continued to harp upon Bokhara, of its mosques, its bazaars, its palaces, its streets, but it was not until he came to the Bazaar of the Jewellers in his survey of the city that the pulse of the Princess leapt once again.

"So," thought the Hakim, "we grow ever warmer. The cause of the malady of this young woman, it would seem, must be sought in the Bazaar of the Jewellers."

So the Hakim pursued his theme, and knowing Bokhara and everyone of importance therein very intimately, he began to describe the shop of every jeweller in the bazaar. And when at last he came to the name of Aboul Fazil, one of

the youngest and handsomest jewellers in the bazaar, the Princess started, trembled exceedingly, and well-nigh fainted. Yet she spoke no word, for royal etiquette did not permit a Princess to address a mere Hakim.

The Hakim respectfully signed to the Sultan to dismiss his daughter, and when she had retired, he said: "O Pillar of the Universe, the case is clear. Your daughter the Princess is pining for love of Aboul Fazil, the handsome young jeweller in the Bazaar of Precious Stones in Bokhara. If you would save her life you must send for him at once."

Now the Sultan, although he was amazed at the skill of Shadrach, was angry when he heard that his daughter had fallen in love with a mere jeweller, but he cherished her so greatly that in order to save her life, he would have married her to a wandering fakir. So he immediately despatched messengers to Aboul Fazil, entreating him to come to his capital without delay.

And in due time the young man arrived in the city. He was tall and strikingly handsome and attired like a prince. And from the moment the Princess beheld him and spoke with him, she at once began to grow better, so that in the course of a few days she had quite recovered and appeared to enjoy the most radiant health. And Aboul Fazil was treated like a pasha, honours were heaped upon him and he was lodged in a suite of the royal chambers.

Great was the satisfaction of the Sultan, and in his gratitude to the Hakim he inquired of him the nature of his reward. But Shadrach, in his modesty, refused all wealth and honours, merely requesting to be made Grand Vizier of the Kingdom. When he heard this request the Sultan was dumbfounded. Great wrath arose within him, but he had pledged his word, and seeing that Shadrach was indeed a shrewd fellow, he agreed to the suggestion with the best grace he could muster.

In no great time, however, it became clear that the jeweller Aboul Fazil, as is the way with such people, had quite lost his head owing to the dignities and attentions which had been so profusely bestowed upon him. Dressed in the choicest silks and smothered in jewels, he strutted to and fro through

the palace like a peacock. Even to the highest dignitaries of the Court he assumed an attitude of insufferable rudeness, and to the Sultan himself he was curt and overbearing. With the Princess he was masterful and disdainful. He insisted that when their nuptials were celebrated he should be recognized as heir to the throne, and that the government of the largest province should be placed in his hands.

In great displeasure and disappointment the Sultan sought counsel of the Hakim.

"My daughter's happiness is everything to me," he cried, "yet this wretch whom I have taken to my bosom, and whom I have treated like my own son born, offends my Court with his riotous insolence and effrontery. What do you advise?"

"O illustrious one," said Shadrach, "there is only one course open to us. We must wean the Princess Banu from her affection for this orgulous and offensive person, and send him back to his booth in Bokhara."

"Easier said than done," shouted the Sultan. "She is besotted with the creature. If we remove him she will droop as before, and will almost certainly perish. All that he does seems to her perfectly natural and even highly amusing, so blind is her worship of him. Only yesterday when I called for sherbet cooled with snow, this son of Eblis verily snatched the cup out of the slave's hands and quaffed its gratefulness to the dregs, and she, bewitched as she is, laughed aloud. He should be lashed on the soles of his feet with the koorbash."

"I sincerely sympathize with your majesty," replied Shadrach soothingly, "but we will gain nothing by harsh measures—indeed the very reverse. No, let us call craft to our aid—craft which has overthrown men a thousand times more handsome and more cunning than this Aboul Fazil."

Now the Sultan had great trust in the shrewdness of the Hakim, so he left the matter entirely in his hands. And Shadrach gave it out that he must go on a journey and would be absent for several weeks. And attiring himself in his old dress of a wandering physician, he took a horse from

the Sultan's stables and rode southwards. And he passed through Khorasan, and by Isfahan, and Luristan, and by Baghdad, he crossed the Syrian desert, and Arabia Petræa, and came at last to Egypt.

Arrived in the Nileland, he rode to the Pyramid of Hawara in the Fayyoum, where the great Labyrinth of Egypt is situated, which it took the reigns of twelve kings to build. The entrance was of white marble, and the interior contained thirty separate regions, each with its vast palace, the whole excavated out of the living rock and situated underground.

And by some art of which he had knowledge, Shadrach traversed the inextricable galleries, making his way in the thick darkness by the light of a small lamp only, past porticoes and banqueting halls, and the statues of gods and kings which littered the length and breadth of this city beneath the earth. And in some of the palaces there were doors which, when he opened them as he passed, emitted a terrible sound like the reverberations of thunder. And here and there lay the mummies of sacred crocodiles.

But none of these things frightened Shadrach. Carefully counting his steps, he walked slowly through the thick gloom, until he had made seven hundred and seventy-seven steps. Then he halted, and turning sharply to his left, traversed seventy-seven steps. And before him was a lofty pylon, in which was a door of two pieces, very high, and cast in bronze.

And on this door he knocked in a certain manner, and after some delay, the door opened slowly on its hinges, disclosing a thin shaft of light far within. Shadrach entered fearlessly, advancing straightway into an inner chamber, where a lamp burned high in the roof, and on a couch an old man, so wizened that he looked like a monkey, lay, looking scarce alive.

"Hail, Father of all Wisdom," cried the Hakim, prostrating himself before the withered ancient. "I have travelled all the way from the country of the Sultan Sunjar to take counsel of you."

"And what," said the ancient, "brings Shadrach the

Physician to Egypt?" Then Shadrach acquainted him with the manner in which affairs stood at the Court, and proceeded to ask a boon.

"What I desire," he said, "is to procure a drug which, if taken by a young and handsome person will make him look old and ugly, while, if it is taken by an old and ill-favoured person, will render him young and handsome."

The ancient pondered the request for some time. Then he spoke. "Such a drug is to be had," he said, "but it is difficult to prepare. Indeed, there is one rare substance indispensable to its making, and that is the blood of a man who is over a hundred years of age, for the blood of such a man contains both the virtues of youth, because he has lived so long, and the venomous qualities of great age, for the same reason."

The Hakim looked long and meaningly at the ancient. "You have more than a hundred years, O Father of Wisdom," he said gently. "Would not some of your blood suffice?"

The old man seemed terrified. He looked at Shadrach in great fear, trembling exceedingly, but said naught.

"Come, how much blood is essential for this experiment?" asked the Hakim brutally.

"As much as will fill the palm of one hand," whispered the sage, "and I fear there is not so much in my whole body."

"Now, as I am a physician," cried Shadrach, "I can assuredly draw such a small supply of blood from you without mishap." And taking a knife and cup from his scrip, he bent down and opened a vein in the old man's arm. The blood ran so slowly that he feared there would not be enough. So he squeezed the arm, whereat the ancient called out shrilly, and as much as would fill a man's palm oozed from the wound.

Then he bound up the wound, and bade the sage prepare the potion, while he rested and refreshed himself. He ate of the millet cakes in his pocket, and then, casting himself down on the bed where the ancient had lain, fell fast asleep.

106 And so weary was he with his long journey that he slept for two days without wakening. And on the morning of the third day, when he opened his eyes, he found the ancient standing over him, with two phials in his hands. One was of a red colour, the other of a sickly green hue.

"Here are the potions," said the sage. "You must exercise great care in their use. Each day you must put three drops of either liquid into the food or drink of the person you wish to transform, no more and no less. The red potion is that which will bestow youth upon an old man, and that which is of a green colour is that which will make a young man old—but only by degrees. Shadrach, this I would not have done for you had you not been of the same secret brotherhood as myself, for you have shown no mercy to an old man."

"Come, Father be reasonable," said Shadrach laughing. "Where should I have found another man over a hundred years old?" And ignoring the chattering protests of the ancient, he carefully wrapped up the phials in his scrip, and making his way out of the labyrinth, went in search of his horse.

He found the beast in a field of millet near the river, where it had done great havoc to the crop, and, mounting it, rode off. For many days he rode, until at last he came once more, very weary, to the Court of the Sultan Sunjar.

By this, matters were at their worst. The wedding of Aboul Fazil and the Princess had been arranged to take place within seven days, and even now the graceless wretch was actually sitting on the Sultan's throne, issuing ukases and commands, and oppressing everyone. But the Sultan was glad to see Shadrach, who assured him that soon all would be well.

And so the cunning Hakim sought the kitchen and gave orders to the chief cook that all dishes intended for Aboul Fazil must first be inspected by himself, as the royal bridegroom had so ordered it. And every day at the noontide meal he poured three drops from the green phial into Aboul Fazil's food.

On the first day the handsome young jeweller complained of feeling very fatigued, and vented his displeasure on everyone. On the second day, great pouches gathered beneath his eyes, and he seemed worn and haggard. On the third day his hair, which was dark and abundant, began to show patches of grey, and he stooped badly, and stumbled in his walk. On the fourth day his face was as the face of an old man.

Meanwhile the Hakim had been careful to take the contents of the red phial. On the first day he felt and looked stronger. On the second his face seemed more youthful, and his cheeks redder and fresher. On the third his white hair grew dark again, and by the time the fourth day had come he had the appearance of a handsome young man of five-and-twenty.

Now the Princess, bewildered at first by the change in the two men, began to show signs of abhorrence for Aboul Fazil. On the first day she looked at him with disfavour, on the second she twitted him on his appearance, on the third she told him that he was like his own grandfather, and on the fourth she refused to look at him.

The nobles and pashas, observing her distaste for her former favourite, fell upon him and with cuffs and buffets expelled him from the Court. And when the Princess turned from Aboul Fazil in disgust, she began to take notice of Shadrach, who, day by day was growing more handsome. And after a week had passed, on the very day when she was to have been united to the now loathsome Aboul, she was wedded to the Hakim, to the joy of the Sultan and of the entire Court who were assured of his wisdom and moderation.

"Sometimes the tortoise wins the race," said the First Imam.

"Especially if he can cast the shell from his back," laughed the Secohd Imam.

Here the Hakim laughed, that soft laugh that the story-tellers have which means that they are willing to relate another tale.

Of the many delightful stories, both old and new, the one approximating the Arabian Nights thrilled his listeners. Thus, however, he told us of the Prince who cleaved the mountain sides with his scimitar. Let it be put in the words of the Prince himself.

The Land of Magic Fountains

Although our circumstances were those of extreme poverty, my mother had always assured me that I was the son of a prince. But she refused to gratify my curiosity any further, so that I remained in ignorance of my true origin. On my eighteenth birthday, however, she gave me a ring engraved with mystic characters, three pieces of gold and a scimitar with a hilt of silver and ivory, and embracing me affectionately addressed me as follows:

"My son, go to the court of the Sultan of the Land of Fountains, which is five days' journey from here. Sit down in the garden behind his palace, and when the Sultan himself makes his appearance, approach him and show him this ring and this sword."

When she had blessed me, I set out upon my journey. By following the direction she gave me I came, in four days, to the Capital of the Land of Fountains and sat down in the garden behind the palace.

Now in this palace is a summer-house of priceless white jade, carved in China, and carried thence on the backs of dromedaries. And as I was feasting my eyes on the beauty of it, which appeared to me as ice in moonlight, I espied through its lattice a loveliness still more exquisite, which burned as a flame in that shining place. A damsel of surprising beauty sat therein. She was like the shadow of a white lily in a dim water, and her eyes were smouldering shadows.

As I gazed in wonder, I was suddenly startled by the sound of a harsh voice, and, turning quickly, was confronted by a tall elderly man of majestic aspect, who was accompanied by two black slaves bearing drawn scimitars.

"How came you here, fellow?" he cried haughtily. "Know you that this is the Sultan's garden?"

"I seek the Sultan," I said simply—for indeed, I had then no skill in courtesy.

"You seek the Sultan!" he said with a laugh. "You in your rags! Well, I am the Sultan. What would you with me?"

"Your Highness," I said humbly, "I bring you this ring and this scimitar," and I profferred him the circlet and the blade.

He took them and his face turned the colour of ashes.

"Where did you find these?" he cried in an awful voice. "Speak quickly, slave."

"I had them from my mother," I said with some spirit, although I confess I trembled. "I am no slave, Your Highness, but the son of a prince."

"Follow me," he said shortly and without another word walked quickly to the palace. We entered. I was amazed at the beauty of the place, for it was the first time that I had seen such a paradise of gold and marble, being used to nothing finer than our village mosque. The white ground of the corridors and galleries was shot with rare stones. To my simple eyes, indeed, they seemed the first steps in some happy dream, and when, at length, we came to a chamber hung with green silk and filled with silver cages of sweet singing birds, I thought that no such wealth could have been in all the earth.

"Your name?" asked the Sultan, as he cast himself upon a divan.

"It is Salim, Your Highness," I replied, "but I know not of my father."

He nodded, stroking his beard and looking at me strangely. "Yet you resemble your father: he was my younger brother."

"Then Your Highness is my uncle?" I cried in astonishment and would have embraced him. But he repulsed me sternly, and commanded me to stand back.

"It is true that I am your uncle," he said in the most ungracious manner possible. "But you have been brought up as a beggar. He may not mingle with princes who is not himself as one of them."

At this I felt the tears come into my eyes, and the blood into my face. Seeing my agitation, the Sultan smiled, though somewhat sourly, and bade me be seated.

"The true blood will show itself," he said, "and the righteous man is just. I will provide you with an oppor-

tunity of proving yourself fitted to take up your rightful position. You saw the damsel in the summer-house of jade?"

I bowed low to conceal the colour which once more suffused my face at his question.

"She is my daughter, the Princess Zara," he continued. "She is under an enchantment. While she was yet a child she was engaged in casting pebbles into the lake which lies at the end of the garden. Suddenly the jinn of the lake arose in anger and cast back one of the pebbles, so that it struck her upon the lips. Ever since that day she has been dumb. I have searched the whole earth in order to find a cure for her affliction. Many sage and wise men have I sought advice from, but without avail, until I received letters from the learned Persian magus, Abra Melim, who has informed me that one antidote alone will cure my daughter's affliction. You have doubtless heard of the mountain Kaf, in Jinnistan, the country of the Jinn?"

"Who has not, Sire?"

"It looks four-square to the quarters of the earth. Its foundation is of emerald and possesses marvellous qualities, for with a shred of this magical jewel men can work wonders, can raise earthquakes and cure diseases. Only with such a fragment of this celestial gem can my daughter's speech be restored."

"Is it your will, Sire, that I should attempt the adventure?"

"It is," replied the Sultan gravely. "It will allow me to discover whether or not you possess those qualities which will fit you for the position to which you lay claim."

"I am perfectly willing to act according to Your Highness's wishes," I said, "but I am inexperienced and scarcely yet a man."

"That is, perhaps, to your advantage," remarked the Sultan with a smile; "the experienced man is more frequently daunted by such an adventure as I propose to you than he whose mind is innocent of the world's craft. Now come with me and we shall arrange for your departure at sunrise tomorrow."

We visited the stables where more than two hundred of

the choicest steeds were kept, and here I selected a white horse of graceful appearance, which the Sultan assured me had yet a high turn of speed and great endurance. From the armoury I chose a scimitar of Damascus steel with a hollow back, into which the Sultan informed me quicksilver had been poured to add weight to a blow. Then, as evening was drawing nigh, I asked the Sultan many questions regarding the strange country to which I was bound. But, of the marvellous things which he recounted to me I will not speak, for did I not behold them with my own eyes?

Before retiring to rest the Sultan handed me a bag of gold sequins. Then, consigning me to the care of Allah, he bade me farewell, counselling me to begin my journey, with the first streak of dawn.

No sooner had the sun risen above the edge of the earth than I was in the saddle. I rode past the palace garden and the summer-house of white jade, where, alas, no light of loveliness now shone. But my vow to recover the boon of speech for the Princess Zara, my cousin, or perish, was strong in my heart, and whipping up my horse, I cantered on. The Sultan had informed me that Jinnistan, the land of the Jinn, or evil ones, was situated in the Far East, so I set my horse's head in that direction.

The day was fair, the road excellent, and making good progress, I came at nightfall to a small caravan sarai, which, so far as I could ascertain, had but one occupant, a shaven marabout, small, old and wizened, who replied to my questions in the briefest manner possible. Deeming him a holy man, I considered it more fitting to leave him to his devotions than to trouble him with inquiries. But what was my surprise on chancing to turn my head in his direction to see that he was engaged not in prayer, as I had thought, but in some magical ceremony. The cry of astonishment which I was unable to restrain at the sight caused him to look up angrily. I trembled, fearful that he should cast an enchantment upon me for my interruption. But the frown upon his face turned, to my amazement, to an indulgent smile and, rising to his feet, he addressed me as follows:

"My son, I perceive that you are alarmed at what you

have seen. But fear nothing. I practise no black art, but only that innocent and exalted sorcery which the wise call white magic. Indeed, the act in which I was engaged was prompted by a desire to aid you. You seem an amiable young man and I merely wished to discover whether your journey would be of advantage to you or otherwise."

I stammered my thanks, which he cut short by a courteous gesture.

"I am aware of the nature of your venture, Selim," he said. "Know that I am the sage, Abra Melim, whom the Sultan of the Land of Fountains consulted regarding the malady of his daughter. You seek the mountain of Kaf. Is it not so?"

Now I was in an excess of dread, for I feared that this strange being might be one of those Jinn who are everywhere in the air, in the sea, and even in the bowels of the earth, and who, knowing my quest, might seek to destroy me. Therefore I remained silent.

"Fear nothing, my son," said Abra Melim kindly. "I can read your thoughts, and I desire to assure you that your suspicions are misplaced. I am neither jinn nor afreet, as you seem to imagine. Indeed, I have command and authority over the spirits of the elements; if you will do me a small office, I will cheerfully assist you in your task, which is, I know, to obtain a piece of the great emerald which is the foundation of Kaf, the world-mountain, which cures all human defects and is the most potent of elixirs, as well as the repository of marvellous forces."

"O sage! whose name is known to the four quarters of the earth," I replied, "you will not be displeased with your servant if he asks the nature of the office you require of him."

"By no means," said Abra Melim. "Listen: I formerly spent many years in Egypt mastering the hidden knowledge of that mysterious land. One day, while seated on the banks of the Nile, speaking with the priest of that country, my companion pointed to the mighty pyramids which cast their shadows on the place where we reclined. 'My son,' remarked the sage, 'you behold those mountains in stone, the memorials of kings who died, while Greece was yet in

the cradle and Rome was unthought of. All the lore that we can teach you is but as a drop of water to the ocean compared with the secrets contained in those monuments. In the heart of the Great Pyramid is a death-chamber, where rests the mummy of the High Priest who designed and built that stupendous pile. On his breast lies a wondrous book containing magical secrets of great potency—that book, indeed, which was given to Adam after the Fall, and by the aid of which Solomon built the Temple at Jerusalem.' From that moment I heard those words I could not rest. I resolved to find my way into the Great Pyramid and possess myself of the magic volume. Collecting a number of people of the land I addressed myself to the task of piercing the solid masonry, which concealed this ineffable treasure, until, after unheard-of labours, I came upon one of its hidden passages. For long I searched in the labyrinths of the vast pyramid ere I arrived at the sepulchral chamber. At length, groping in the profound darkness, and haunted by the rustling of the wrappings of the mummied Pharaohs, I came upon the shrine where the corpse of the High Priest lay in grim state. I opened the sarcophagus, and, unwrapping the voluminous bandages, found the mystic tome lying among spices and amulets on the shrivelled breast. But as I attempted to seize it my hand suddenly grew numb, as if frozen at the wrist. I was unable to move. At the same time an awful voice pierced the silence of the chamber of the dead.

"'Forbear!' it cried. 'This sacred volume which you covet may be borne hence by one only—one destined through the ages for the task. Depart lest harm befall thee.'

"Terrified, I hastened from the pyramid. For years I sought by magic arts to discover who might be that destined one who alone might bear away the Book of Secrets. At last it was vouchsafed to me that it was none other than yourself."

"Myself!" I echoed in amazement.

"None other, as I say. For many years I have watched over you, waiting for the time when I might reveal this to

you and ask for your aid. The day is now at hand. In short, it falls upon the morrow."

"But, sage, Abra Melim," I cried, "if what you say is true, what hope have you of regaining the treasure of which you have told me? We are far from the land of Egypt, and it would seem to me that the great opportunity is passed."

"Not so, my son," replied the sage with a smile. "We shall be in Egypt by tomorrow morning."

With these words he passed outside to where my white horse was tethered, and muttering some words I could not comprehend, struck him twice upon the withers. Immediately two large wings sprouted from the animal's shoulders, growing in size, and spread until they reached the ground. With an agility I could not have credited him with, the magician leaped into the saddle, and called me to take my place behind him. Then he whispered a word of power into the ear of my steed, and before I well understood what was happening, we were soaring high over the trees which surrounded the caravan sarai.

I felt not the slightest giddiness, nor any fear that I would be cast to the earth below. We proceeded at a prodigious pace, at ten times the rate at which a horse gallops on the earth. Beneath us cities, streams and deserts were spread out like the patterns upon a praying-mat. On and ever onward we flew. At length the sun went down, and we continued our flight by the moonlight. All night we sped through the star-candled vault of the heavens. With the first light of dawn I could see the shimmering of a great river which Abra Melim told me was the mouth of the Nile, a vast expanse of green, through which there meandered five streams spread out like fingers of a man's hand laid flat.

Scarcely an hour later we saw what seemed low hills of stone rise on the sands of the desert.

"These, my son," said Abra Melim, "are the pyramids. That one which towers above others is our destination. Prepare for the ordeal before you."

Now the magician had mentioned nothing as yet regarding any ordeal through which I might have to pass, and as I heard his ominous words I trembled despite myself. To

what doom of horror might I be devoted? Alas, it was too late to think upon such things or to draw back, and in another moment we had alighted at the base of the gigantic structure of granite which frowned above us like the mass of a mountain.

Abra Melim uttered a spell which seemed to turn my horse into stone, so motionless it became. Then he signalled to me to follow him up the face of the Great Pyramid. Painfully I clambered up behind him, although I noticed that the ascent did not appear to trouble him in the least. Up and up we climbed, until at length, we saw a great doorway make a black mouth upon the shining granite. The magician entered his own house and in great fear I followed.

We halted for a moment while he produced and lighted a lamp with a flint and steel, and then, as if he knew the ways and windings of the place as familiarly as the depths of his own soul, we plunged into the gloomy labyrinth. On and on we walked through the hush of those dusty galleries of the dead, disturbing a thousand bats, and stumbling over the debris of centuries. At last Abra Melim stopped before a great pylon, on the sides of which he fumbled with his fingers. The stone which closed it rose to his touch upon the secret spring, and disclosed a shadowy interior from which came a strong odour of spices.

"Enter," whispered Abra Melim, who himself appeared to be over-awed. "You will find the book on the breast of the royal mummy. Take it fearlessly, and return."

"How shall I see without the lamp?" I asked with chattering teeth.

"Enter, I say," said the magician harshly. "I will hold the lamp so that you might have light."

I obeyed him and entered. I could perceive no tomb or even the semblance of one, nothing but a vast and empty chamber, and I was about to turn to acquaint Abra Melim with this, when a noise loud and terrible as thunder, sounded upon my ears, and I heard the great stone door crash to the ground behind me. At the same time a peal of mocking laughter came from the other side.

"Fool," cried the voice of the magician, "perish in your folly. It was your desire to discover the mountain Kaf. Know, then, that you have indeed done so. For what you thought was a pyramid was none other than the mountain which stands four-square to the points of the compass, and in the recess of which you shall remain until the last day. The Nile you saw was a Nile of enchantment. As for me, I am the Jinnee Salac, guardian of the mountain in which you are now imprisoned. Farewell!"

Now when I heard these words I fell to the ground as one dead. My senses deserted me, so that I seemed to descend past walls of darkness into a great pit. When I came to myself I was still lying upon the ground in the chamber in which the cruel Jinnee, masquerading as a friendly magician, had imprisoned me. I recalled that he had described it as the interior of the magic mountain of Kaf, which it had been my hope to despoil of a portion of its emerald foundation. But there was small chance that I should do so now. I was doomed, I told myself, to perish in the hideous darkness which surrounded me. The thought was anguish and I wept.

But, as I was bemoaning my fate, I was startled to hear a small but quite audible voice proceeding from the scimitar I carried. At first I thought it must be a delusion of the senses occasioned by the horrible surroundings in which I found myself, but when it continued to address me, in tones of comfort and assurance, I listened attentively.

"O Prince," it said, "be not downcast, for I am able to assist you in the most powerful manner. You believe that it is merely quicksilver which is enclosed in your scimitar, for the purpose of adding weight to the swordsman's stroke. But I assure you that I am a spirit, imprisoned in the weapon you wear for an ancient misdemeanour. If I aid you, and secure your freedom, will you faithfully promise to break the blade in which I am kept in durance, and let me go free once more?"

Desperate as I was, I immediately gave the required assurance, and the afreet—for such I believed him to be—continued: "I accept your word. Know then that by

virtue of my presence in this scimitar, it has the power of cleaving any substance, no matter how hard it be. Even adamant will not withstand its edge. Strike boldly then at the door of granite which separates you from the outer world, and you will find yourself free."

Hope arising in my heart, I immediately drew the sword from its sheath, and, groping my way to the door, directed a blow at it with all my strength. The good blade sheared through the granite as though it had been made of parchment. For a moment I stood amazed at the marvellous power of the weapon in my hand, but, recollecting the danger in which I was, I renewed the attack upon the stone, which presently fell in fragments at my feet. Stepping from the chamber, I found myself in the great gallery, where, for a moment, I stood irresolute, not knowing which way to turn. But the small voice from the scimitar spoke once more, advising me to turn to the left.

Little by little I groped my way along the passage. The feel of the walls told me what I had believed to be stone was in reality earth, and I knew that I was in the depths of the mountain of Kaf. The voice from the scimitar continued to guide me, advising me as to the turnings I must take, until at length I beheld what seemed to be a star shining in the darkness of night.

Pressing on, I saw that it was night indeed in the other world, but when at last I came to the entrance of the mountain, and was about to descend, such a fierce wind arose that, despite my utmost efforts, I could not proceed a single foot. Again and again, I threw myself against what seemed a very wall of wind, but without avail.

"Use me," cried the voice from the sword. "Cut at the wind, as you did at the granite."

I did as I was bidden, and almost immediately the wind died down. Then, for I felt the surrounding presence of things evil, I made all haste to leave the mountain, down the side of which I scrambled in a panic of fear lest yet some other sleight of sorcery should seek to hinder my progress. Nor were my fears groundless, for, no sooner had I descended half-way, than I was seized as if by a score of hands,

which sought to detain me. This time I required no advice how to act, but, whirling the scimitar above my head, slashed left and right. As I did so the most doleful shrieks and cries rent the air, as if proceeding from men mortally wounded. Presently they died away in hideous moaning, and I was not again molested. So making the best of my way to the foot of the mountain, I stood at last upon a substance so slippery to the feet, as to make me feel certain that it could be no other than the foundation of emerald, a shred of which the Sultan had commanded me to secure.

Wielding my scimitar, I hacked mightily at the glossy platform upon which I stood. At the first blow there was a sound as of splintering. At the second, the jewel-mass crackled ominously. At the third, a fragment rebounded, and struck me upon the eyes. Instantly, the scene around me seemed as if plucked out of the shadows of night, and I could behold all objects within the range of my vision as clearly as if they had been suffused in the strongest sunlight. I now vow that I had indeed succeeded in detaching several pieces of emerald from the parent mass and, gathering them up, placed them in the folds of my turban. But what amazed me even more than the wondrous virtue of the sword I carried, was the circumstance that I was able to see the reflection of myself in the green mirror-like substance on which I stood, which told me that I had altered somewhat in appearance, and had, indeed, grown a small beard.

"Cease! O Prince! to marvel at what you see," cried the small voice from the sword, "for know that you have been immured in the heart of the mountain Kaf for more than a year—so quickly does time speed in the land of the Jinn. Now keep your vow, and free me from the bondage in which I still remain."

"But how, O Spirit, may that be accomplished?" I asked, "seeing that even the most adamant substances break at your touch?"

"Strike my hilt upon the emerald beneath you," replied the voice. "It is only in the blade that virtue resides."

Seizing the scimitar by the curving blade, I struck the hilt sharply upon the green and shining floor. The handle

at once fell away, and what seemed a ball of quicksilver ran out from beneath it. For a moment this withered upon the glassy ground upon which it had fallen, then grew and grew, until, to my amazement, I was confronted by the semblance of a tall warrior clad in silver armour which shone with radiance of moonlight.

"I am the Spirit of the Scimitar," he said, in a voice as loud and powerful as it had hitherto been weak. "I thank you gratefully, Prince, for my deliverance. You doubtless desire to return to the palace of the Sultan of the Land of Fountains. Well, you have but to hold a fragment of the emerald of Kaf in your hand, and desire to be there, to find yourself at your destination."

With these words, and ere I could reply, he vanished. Acting as he had instructed me, I held a fragment of the emerald in my hand, and wished to be transported to the Sultan's garden. Almost before the wish had passed through my mind, I found myself standing beside the summer-house of white jade.

It was still night to others, though not to me, but I boldly entered the palace, and made my way to the Sultan's apartment. On being admitted, he at once recognized me, but informed me that I had been given up for lost. His joy on hearing that the desired antidote had been obtained was overwhelming, and he at once sent for the Princess Zara. When the jewel was placed upon her lips she regained the power of speech, and so grateful was her father for her release from the bondage of dumbness, that he immediately bestowed her hand on me. Our union is one of the most perfect happiness, and I have found in her a jewel more inestimable and more to be praised than the emerald of Kaf.

The Hakim would have gone on with his stories, if we were not reminded that the Great Annual Passion Play had started in the Persian capital; and some of my accompanying pilgrims hurried back to Tehran to witness it: for more than twenty millions were in mourning for the martyrdom of the grandsons of the Prophet.

Many things were taboo during that period. Days and

nights have been passed in sullen meditation. The whole country radiated an atmosphere of unadulterated gloom.

No marriages were to be solemnized in that part of the year, no public works of any importance had been put in operation, nothing new could or should be bought from the shops; and the women had shrouded themselves in black raiment, and had eschewed the use of scents and cosmetics.

The mosques have been crowded with sobbing, wailing humanity. Men and women had thronged in the Halls of Mourning for weeks, and if they came home for a night's rest, it was only to rise the next day and go into a fresh period of intense mourning.

The mullahs have retold for the thousandth time the circumstances attending the assassination of Syadra Hussain and Hassar at the hands of Yazid, the great Arab chieftain at Karbella in Iraq.

As the priests have recited the sacred battle-scenes the entire congregations have rocked in unison and wailed and moaned for hours upon end.

Swollen eyes and saddened faces have been on every hand and the very atmosphere has been lachrymose. The whole country has been enervated by a seeping, overwhelming, nerve-destroying, lugubrious melancholy.

It has been truly awful. I could, with the greatest of ease, dissolve into tears myself as I pen these lines.

Today, thanks be to Allah, sees the culmination of these unending hours of tense, soul-destroying gloom, and tomorrow Persia will smile once again.

I sit in a marble alcove overlooking the Poppy Avenue, Tehran's principal thoroughfare. Outside the air quivers with the heat and a mirage is discernible in the distance. Here, however, I am reasonably cool.

For days, peasants from the surrounding countryside have been flocking into Persia's capital to take part in this wondrous Passion Play, which, in the main, is processional.

From the distance there comes the thud of drums and the mournful cries of thousands of devotees. Gradually this whirl of noise comes nearer and there passes before me the

processionists living in act and thought the events of some 1300 years ago.

Men, hundreds of them, beat small drums. The air throbs with their incessant tapping. Other men slowly pass bearing black-draped poles from which flutter inscriptions in Persian.

More men—standard-bearers now—guarded by others waving scimitars. But for the mournful wailing and the doleful mien of those who pass, the scene might easily recall others, less pacific, from the days of the French Revolution.

Still more men—important personages these—grouped around a dozen stalwarts who stagger beneath the weight of two immense poles. Stretched between these poles is a gigantic black cloth upon which there are Persian characters inscribed in gold thread.

But the processionists themselves!

The men, for the main part, wear white shirts, the fronts of which are smeared with red paint—a gruesomely realistic representation of the gore spilled after the bloody battle of Karbella.

Yes, and there are some, fresh from the sacred pilgrimage to Karbella, who require no paint. On their bared chests they carry heavy spiked chains. Their representation of the battle-field scenes is very real. As they pass in a sun temperature of over 115 degrees the smell of the blood is wafted to one.

As these devout gentlemen pass, others loom up—horsemen now, representing the victorious army of Yazid.

And then, a magnificent Arab gelding, spotlessly white, figurative of the charger which bore the lustful Yazid.

As the gelding passes, with the precision and the timing of a well-drilled army, a thousand and more bare arms arise. These are simultaneously crashed against bare chests and shaven heads.

In obedience to the behest of a flushed, perspiring leader, these self-inflicted body beatings will continue until darkness brings relief to flagellated bodies and overwrought nerves.

And there is no deception.

Clump, clump, clump!

The beating of suffering, inflamed, vibrating flesh goes on with a regularity which of itself can only augment the intense physical agony endured by so many who take part in Islam's Shia Passion Play.

It is all so intense, so earnest, so vitally a part of the religious observances of the Persians, for this is *the* day of mourning—mourning, that is, *in excelsis*.

But, with the waning of the stars into the dawn of to-morrow, this black period of national melancholy passes for another year.

In the morning the bazaars will be thronged. The sweetmeat-sellers will sell prodigious piles of sticky wares. The women will appear in gay raiment. Persia will smile once again and settle down to ordinary business.

The Infidel Repays

When we left Tehran, as pilgrims to the distant land of Hind, the soft air of ancient Iran also deserted us; for that wondrous philosophy that Omar Khayyam sang no longer obtained in the rapidly developing coast of the Persian Gulf. Here men talked about the Oil Fields, the Pearl Fishing, and much else, which spoke of that industrialism which is now sweeping over the heart of the Middle East; and which might land her, goodness only knows where: possibly where the West has arrived, that is, in Unemployment, Financial Crashes, and those Conferences which, after years of talking, end where they begin.

The flat-bottom boats of the Iraqians nestled here and there amongst the palm-skirted creeks as our steamer ploughed its way to the Indian shores. The Slave-trader's barge, which provides the yellow-press journalists with so much imaginary copy, was not hurrying to the Oman coast, for the reason that such things do not exist. And then opened up before us that wide, wide sea that laps the sands of Kerachi.

Thence we hied forth to shrines that lay in the land of the free—in the land which is No-Man's-Land, where neither the Afghans nor the British have any control; and where without exception live the men who can be called Men: I mean the Independent Area of the Anglo-Afghan Frontier, where the Chief, who as a fellow-pilgrim and host related the story of his uncle's life; for the praises of Hamid Khan were in the mouth of every Khyber warrior.

The fact that Hamid Khan had just finished his prayer did not deter him from planning vengeance, for a man cannot carry revenge in his heart for long without its becoming a part of himself, and Hamid Khan had already waited for two years. "Of a truth, by the hoof of the Evil One," he muttered to himself, "as an opportunity has not occurred I will even create one, and take my way to the land of the Feringhees, who, unfortunately, but little appreciate my noble calling, and care not to welcome me in their land."

True it was that he had not been too well treated the last

time he had ventured beyond the safety of his own hills into Peshawar, where he had perforce been obliged to go for a rifle, so dear to the hearts of the men who live beyond the Khyber. There is an explanation for most things, and the fact that the owner had given his life as well as his weapon was sufficient for anyone whose calling differed from that of his frontiersmen. "But what did it matter about the Feringhee anyway," thought he, "he is one less, and I would that he had been the one who murdered my brother Habeeb Khan, on whom be peace. Was it not such an one who killed my brother after calling him a pig, the worst insult on a Pathan, and one that can only be wiped out in blood."

It was vengeance for this, then, that Hamid Khan thirsted.

"Time hangs heavily on these hands of mine," murmured the Pathan to himself, "and I would have things out with the Feringhee Captain who lives in the land of Hindustan." And the Pathan touched his Afghan knife lovingly. "Of a truth will I go to that land of pestilence as a trader, so will I find this Feringhee, for as a trader none will suspect my intention, and by the help of Allah will I square the deal with the Kaffir." After which comforting thought Hamid Khan drew a hissing breath and spat forcefully to relieve his feelings. "It is a way after mine own heart," he said chuckling in his beard, for the Captain must think the affair long forgotten, while the privilege of forgetting is mine!" He arose, put away his hookah, adjusted his turban, and taking his stick, proceeded to the village Bazaar, where he spent a few of his scanty store of rupees on some rugs, which he hoisted on his shoulder, smiling all the while at his shrewdness. "These rugs will stand me well in the land of the Feringhees, who fly devil machines and eat pig. Not a hint shall I drop to my kinsmen lest my purpose fail and I become the butt and jest of every beardless youth in the village."

Difficulties as to road expenses might arise, but it was only to outward appearance that Hamid Khan was a peaceful trader. No one knew better, when necessity arose, how to extract the rupees from the Hindoo money-lenders, wary and otherwise. So the fact that his money-belt was uncom-

fortably empty caused neither discontent nor discouragement to him. Grasping his stout stick he set forth along the hill road with the easy stride of a man accustomed to walking long distances. The rugs dangled over his left shoulder, a mixture of happiness and revenge was in his heart, and the words Allah-ho-Akbar—God is great—were on his lips. From time to time he met fat bunias—money-lenders—making their way in their usual ponderous gait to collect outstanding monies due to them. It must have been for a considerable sum, for only in these circumstances do the ease-loving Hindoos care to brave the perils that await such as they in the narrow and danger-fraught hill-passes. These Shylocks cast uneasy glances at the big Pathan, with the best of good reasons. But Hamid Khan was not in pressing necessity, and perhaps on the return journey, having, by the help of Allah, disposed of his enemy, he would naturally want to commemorate the occasion by giving a feast to his village. If he had his usual good fortune this would coincide with the return of the bunia with a few fat bags of rupees. Truly the ways of Allah were great!

So for many days Hamid Khan travelled in peace through the hills, and down through the boulder-strewn passes where a blade of grass is as rare as water in the desert. Eventually he arrived in India, the goal of his undertaking. "I will eat now," spoke the frontiersman to himself, when he eventually sat in the Bazaar at Peshawar, "for I have the feeling of emptiness, which does not make for comfort." Swarthy hillmen strode through the Bazaar chewing dried figs and buying mulberries all the way from Afghanistan. Here and there dreamy-eyed Usebeks in long felt boots and fur hats as worn in far-off Turkestan wended their way through the crowds. Everyone parted readily with his money in this land of plenty.

As he sat eating rice cooked in Pathan fashion, some old comrades of past lurid exploits passed near him on their way through the Bazaar. They would have welcomed an exchange of confidences with their old friend, but one look from him intimated that it was not an auspicious moment to renew acquaintanceship, and no further recognition took

place. Well they knew they would hear the story in the near future in the peace and hospitality of their own hills, where there was no danger attached to the asking of questions. Having eaten, Hamid Khan rose to his feet. "Now will I proceed to the dwelling of the Feringhee, which will be of a situation greatly different to that of the men of Hindustan whom the Englees have conquered these many years." Hamid Khan laughed the care-free laugh of a hillman. Everything was going even better than he had expected, for it was always that he could choose his destination.

He left the Bazaar and made his way through the city to the Military Cantonment. "Of a surety these Feringhees well know the ways of comfort and pleasure," he remarked to himself as he approached a large bungalow. "They have taken soft ways much to the heart." Just at that crucial moment further ruminations were cut short by the approach of two military policemen, who came towards him in anything but a friendly manner. "What are you doing here?" one asked him in the native language. "Yesterday we thought we had rounded up every Pathan within a radius of ten miles after they raided the Bazaar the night before, and if here isn't one at large under our very noses." "I know nothing of what you speak," replied Hamid, "I am but a poor trader, whose only desire is to sell a few rugs to the Sahibs in the bungalows here and then return home."

"Not on your life," said one of the white policemen, at which both laughed. "Hand over the old blunderbuss and come with us. Obediently Hamid Khan handed over his stick. His wrists were handcuffed and as he marched along the baking road between his captors his heart sank. Was this then to be the end of the opportunity just as success had presented itself, thought he. A few moments more saw him inside the cell of a wayside prison. The door clanged behind him, and his activities, so far as the outside world was concerned, were finished. He gazed longingly at the bungalows from the iron-barred window. "Fool that I was not to wait until nightfall, for the darkness hath ever been a good friend to me. It is well that I mentioned not this plan

of mine to the village folk, for their jokes would have brought the taste of bitterness to this mouth of mine!"

His captors, two officious-looking English soldiers, kept inside the shady veranda opposite, while the sun shone straight through the barred window of the prison cell. "Of what do these Feringhees talk?" wondered the captive, as the policemen laughed loudly. "Would that positions were changed and that these captors were at my mercy in mine own hills. Laugh they might, but it would only be if they enjoyed my hospitality!" The thought of how he would like to entertain the guards under the changed circumstances was too much for Hamid Khan; he forgot his predicament and laughed with vigour. "Lummy!" ejaculated one of the policemen in true soldier's jargon, "Is he balmy?" Then turning to his companion he said, "You bet he feels the heat as bad as we do." And here he broke the rules of the prison by handing a cigarette to the Pathan.

That night there was no sleep for the prisoner in the hot discomfort of the narrow cell, and day brought the merciless heat of the sun, which at noon shone once more on the prisoner. "Allah-ho-Akbar," cried the Pathan as he lay on the floor, minus coat, shoes and turban. Just then some Army officers came and looked in at him. A long conversation took place between them and the guards, and when the officers rode away one of the policemen spoke to the prisoner at the grating. "You are to get out tomorrow, Miller Sahib says so, and you had better beat it after that, old lad, or you might have a dusty time if we catch you again." But the last sentence was lost on Hamid Khan. All the gathered vengeance of the last two years rose before him. In an instant he was on his feet, the lethargy gone, the heat forgotten. Although he was in the grip of rage and great excitement his voice showed no emotion as he said, "This Miller Sahib must be a great soldier when a word of his can excuse a prisoner who sees no way of escape." "Yes," came the reply, on every word of which the frontiersman hung, "he is in the Frontier Rifles, that is his bungalow over there with the wall round it. He used to know your God-forsaken part of the country well." "Ah!" The

ejaculation was a mixture of relief and returned hope. "Miller Sahib of the Frontier Rifles! The murderer of my brother Habeeb Khan!" thought the hillman. "It is well to have suffered so to have the prey delivered into mine hands! Allah-ho-Akbar!" Never had the Pathan uttered the words with such reverence or so great a belief in their truth.

That night there was little sleep for Hamid Khan, for the excitement after the agony and disappointment of the last few days was as new life to the man. The discomfort was forgotten, nothing but tomorrow's freedom and what it meant was in his mind. Next day he was free and lost no time in getting to the bungalow of Captain Miller. Entering the compound he went to the kitchen quarters. "Salaam-alaikum" (Peace be on you), he said to the cook. "Does your master require such poor services as I can offer?" "The Sahib is away," replied the cook. "He has much work of great importance to do, and will not return until tonight, when he has a burra khana (dinner party), but he requires a chowkidar (night-watchman), and if it is not too long for you to wait I think you can be sure of the job. The Sahib has much money and gives good pay." "I will wait," replied Hamid Khan, who thought that a few hours were as nothing compared to the last two years.

That night saw him in his new role of chowkidar to the Englishman. The rest was only the matter of a few hours. Many times he walked round the bungalow, as was his duty. The dinner party was in full swing, and the Captain had just given him some orders, adding that if a message came for him during the night it would be important and it was to be given to him at once. The Sahib would be retiring soon, thought Hamid Khan, and I shall rest for an hour, for the last few nights have unnerved me, and I would have a steady hand, for tonight calls for one.

He awoke some time later with a start. "Fool that I am," murmured the frontiersman, "how long have I slept, and what is the hour? Lucky it is that it is still dark." A clock struck the hour of 2 a.m. All was silent. Even the seemingly tireless jackals held their peace. "The hour is come!"

muttered Hamid Khan. "Strength to my sword arm! Now will I challenge and slay the Feringhee ere cock crow, and the father of the man who will capture Hamid Khan under circumstances so auspicious has yet to learn the art of walking!" Slipping off his sandals, the Pathan made his way noiselessly along the veranda to the Captain's bedroom. The night was hot and the glass door had been left open as is the custom. It was the work of a few seconds to slip aside the grass chick (blind) and creep into the bedroom. The frontiersman found himself in a large room, in which a dim light showed in a distant corner. Drawing his long Afghan blade he approached the bed. "Son of a dog!" he said in a gruff whisper, "behold in me Hamid Khan, the avenger of my brother Habeeb Khan! Arise, murderer! and strike thy tulwar on mine, for either thou or I shalt die! Sit up, for I kill not any man while he lies asleep!" There was no sound from the bed and Hamid repeated the challenge. As he said the last words a form rose in the bed, and to his amazement Hamid Khan saw the figure of a woman. He drew back. "A woman!" he cried. "Do mine eyes behold a woman? What is this? Art thou a ghost? an afrit? Speak!" "I am no ghost," came the reply in steady tones, "I am a woman." "Where is the Captain?" "I do not know." Again the reply showed no sign of fear. Terror seized the hillman. There was something mysterious in the situation. Perhaps Allah in his desire to save the life of the Englishman had changed him to woman's form. "It cannot be that these eyes of mine play me false," reasoned the Pathan. Terrified at what other mystery might overtake him in this land of unreality, he dashed from the bungalow and out into the darkness. Hamid Khan, whose name for bravery was known on all the broad frontier, frightened by a woman! He hastened on, and dawn saw him on his way out of the land of the unbelievers.

Eight days later he arrived home to find the place almost in ruins. Huge branches from the mulberry trees were strewn in confusion everywhere, great dark stains on the ground showed more clearly than any words could have done what had happened. The thatched roofs had been

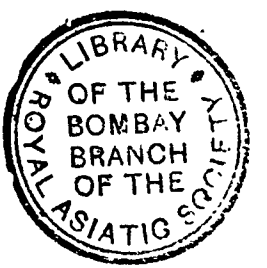
burned, and the watch-tower was dismantled. The unaccustomed silence sent a shudder of fear through the heart of the Pathan, fear as to the safety of his aged father. He hurried to his home, where he found his father alive but suffering from severe wounds and grief at the death of his youngest son who had been killed in his sight. It appeared that a neighbouring Chief had renewed an old quarrel and taken the village unawares, so that the father and his followers had had more than enough to do to defend themselves. As luck would have it some British soldiers, newly arrived, and stationed only a short distance away, came to the old man's aid. He continued for long in glowing terms of the bravery of the white soldiers, and especially of the leader, who defended the wounded old man at great peril to his own life. The Captain leader of the soldiers lay now in hospital so badly wounded that he might not recover. "Long have I spit at the sight of a Feringhee, O my son," spoke his father, "but Allah hath shown me the error of hatred in mine old age, for had we been alone we should surely have been killed in their absence."

When the old man recovered sufficiently he and Hamid Khan went to the hospital to thank the Englishman for his assistance and to enquire how he was progressing. When they reached the bedside both men were moved to pity, for the man lying there was swathed in bandages and only one eye was visible. He was too weak from loss of blood to talk, and the visitors were asked to leave after a few moments. The next time they went to the hospital the patient had improved, and talking was allowed. During the conversation the Captain said that when he felt he was dying an incident hung heavily on his conscience, and that he would now like to ease his mind by relating it to the visitors.

Haltingly and with difficulty the Captain told of how he had accidentally shot one of their countrymen. Two years ago he had employed a Pathan as night-watchman. One night, returning from the Club, where he had had too much to drink, he found the chowkidar asleep instead of attending to his duties. He called the man a pig, the worst insult on a Pathan, and the punishment for which by hill-law is death.

But the Pathan having eaten the salt of the Captain gave the latter the chance to take back his words. The Englishman was not in his right senses and repeated the insult. The chowkidar snatched his knife and rushed at the Captain, who drew his revolver in self-defence. The two closed and struggled. The revolver went off, and the Pathan rolled to the ground. He was dead. Silence reigned in the white-washed ward of the little hospital. Hamid Khan stroked his beard. "And the name of the chowkidar?" he demanded, with emphasis on every word. "Habeeb Khan," came the reply. "Knowest thou that he was mine own brother and dearer to me than my right hand. Dost thou know that I have carried hatred for thee in mine heart for two years until like a burning fire it consumed me and the only ease mine spirit knew was the plan I made to destroy thee. It was to carry out this that I braved the perils and travelled into the land of Hindustan to crush the life out of thee with these hands of mine. For the hate I bore thee was as great as the love I had for mine own brother. With difficulty I reached Peshawar and obtained work as a chowkidar in thy service. That night thou told me of the urgent message I know now that thou wert called away here. But I knew it not then, and made my way to thy room to kill thee, and so avenge my brother. On reaching thy room I was afraid when a woman appeared, when I expected only thee, and I thought that Allah saw fit to preserve thy life by changing thee to the form of a woman. I fled, for a Pathan does not kill women." The brigand's voice rose in anger again and again as he related the story of his hatred. Now, placing his head between both hands, he said, "Thanks be to Allah that thy life was spared and for thy noble defence of my old father who is more dear to me than anything on this earth. My affection for him is greater than my hate for thee. Thus, by saving him thou hast paid the debt. Take this torquoise ring from my finger, and if ever thou shouldest be in danger from any of my clansmen show it, and it will assure thee passage in safety where no white man dare go. In this wise I prove to thee that instead of the great hate I bore thee, gratitude only remains in the heart of Hamid Khan."

The Man who made Gold



Though on pilgrimage bound, and innocent of all warlike intentions, we yet felt a relief upon emerging from No-Man's-Land.

A line of dromedaries it was that carried us beyond the famous Khyber Pass, a line of hairy ships of those stretches where nothing grows, nothing lives comfortably, and men are the men of the tulwar, yet devout followers of Allah's Law.

In the caravan sarai where we had rested, a jaded and much frightened Upper India man lay on his bedstead. He had retired from the service of the Ferangi Sirkar, and, having no one to care for, the wanderlust came upon him all of a sudden as it were.

He will have our pilgrim band go to the secret shrines that lurk in the folds of the Himalayas.

He had spent much of his time in the heat-stricken desert of Sindh during his employment: thence he went for a wandering on his own. There he wanted to lead us, especially to show the part where he saw a man make gold.

By way of persuasion he described his journey to the curious alchemist.

My thoughts, he said, once turned fondly to the cool uplands of Afghanistan, or the Himalayan Shrines where the thermometer drops rapidly at night and refreshing sleep comes to the weary. And towards that great wall of mountains that stand between India and China I bent my steps. In India there are millions who constantly dream of the Himalayas, and long to see them before they die, because, to the Hindu, the mountains have religious associations. Somewhere beyond the great peaks and sublime ranges lies Swarga, the Paradise of Indra, the God who slays each year the Demon of Drought and calls for rain with a voice which men refer to as thunder.

Then happily I met an old Bokharian pilgrim. This was Mahammed Yusuf, a native of Turkestan, who had fought against the Russians when they invaded his country, and fled from it a refugee, for he was a marked man. Although

old in years he was energetic and wiry, and not only was he a perfect mountaineer but he knew the language of more than one hill tribe, he knew, besides, many a secret by-way among the mountains.

He was paying a business visit to Lahore.

"If you stay here," said he, "you will be baked to a cinder."

I smiled and nodded languidly. Cinder seemed the right word, a hot, dry one. But ere we reached coolness, however, we made a journey by train through dust and heat.

In time, however, our pilgrim faces were turned towards the glorious Karakum range of mountains. We had to cross that portion of the Western Himalayas which lies north of the Punjab, south of Tibet, west of Bhutan and east of Kashmere. This is the region where, of old, India came in touch with the Empire of China, and through which the Buddhist missionaries travelled to teach the strange doctrines of their saint as far back as the days of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah. This way, too, came, and still comes, another lot of folk from the opposite direction. These are the Chinese smugglers. They favoured the Kangra valley to the south, and through it brought on ponies loads of wool which were transferred afterwards to the Punjab. This wool-smuggling business should be of interest because it laid the basis of the world-wide trade in the famous Kashmere shawls. Bad roads and heavy duties have hindered the proper development of this industry on legal lines.

The mention of shawls reminds me that we had left the oven-like atmosphere of Lahore far behind and were cool, happy and full of energy, enjoying the mountains as only mountaineers can. Often, at morning and evening, Mahammed Yusuf, when he lit his cigarette, would say, "We'll have to light something bigger before long." We both smiled, thinking of what we had left. The "something bigger" was a cave-fire.

Up, up we went, up and also down. We had reached a great "table land" with mountains cropping up on it like warts, and deep gorges that seemed like old cracks in a table. Sometimes we climbed two thousand feet, only to find that

we had to descend four thousand, and then had to face a still greater climb from the very feet of the mountains to their shoulders. Our first real obstacle, however, was the river Beas, which glorifies very wild scenery.

Here we enjoyed a cool bathe in a safe pool, thinking of Lahore and pitying everyone there. And what energy it gave us! One felt one could climb a ladder reaching to the moon, if necessary.

But our immediate problem was how to cross the river. Boating was out of the question, owing to the wildness of the waters and the want of boats. A couple of natives, however, conducted us to what is called "a safe crossing-place." It did not look particularly safe, but Mahammed Yusuf assured me there was nothing to fear. We were to cross by a Jhula, or rope bridge. This bridge consisted of eight or nine ropes attached to poles on either side of the river. Along the ropes slides a suspended seat which is drawn backwards and forwards. The passenger balances himself in the seat, holds on like grim death, and, if he is a novice, shuts his eyes as the seat rocks and jolts in dizzy space. I opened my eyes when half-way across and promptly shut them again. Then I scolded myself for being afraid and tried to enjoy myself even when the seat stuck for a moment and had to be jolted backward and sent spinning ahead again at a run. I crossed safely and felt happy when I was on firm ground again. It was good to be alive!

We had now entered on real Alpine land. High, stern, tremendous cliffs bordered yawning passes, and charming green valleys seemed to be scooped out at the most unexpected places. There were no jungles, but, instead, wonderful and beautiful groves of poplars in somewhat damp localities. Think of glimpses of miles and miles of these stately trees, which in the twilight seemed to be alive as a breeze shivered through them, and they nodded their bushy heads and swayed their stumpy arms against the soft, dim sky.

North-eastward we went until we reached the town of Kulu. Here we felt that we were in a strange country indeed, so strange were the people and their customs. The

women, who are darkish-brown in complexion, have long anticipated the English munition workers of war-time days for they all wear breeches and work as hard, perhaps harder than men. They are very energetic and strong.

We had another river to cross, but not on a rope-bridge: nor were there boats, that is, ordinary boats, on the ferries. I was amazed to find that the means of crossing rivers were as ancient as Nimrod, " the mighty hunter." One of my friends at Lahore was an archæologist and he had shown me an English book of ancient history which had photographs of old Mesopotamian sculptures that depict Assyrian soldiers crossing the river Euphrates on skin-floats in the days of the Hebrew prophets. Here, in this strange land, the ancient Assyrian skin-floats are still in use.

Although the people do not look like Assyrians, or even like descendants of the " Ten Lost Tribes " who were made captives by the Assyrians, and for whom so many people have been searching all over the globe.

The skins used were those of bullocks. I learned the process of making these floats from Mahammed Yusuf. The skin is flayed by first making an incision in the back part of a hind leg. Then it is carefully removed as in the process of " casing a hare," except that the skin is cut through below and round the knee and hocks, the legs being left adhering to the body. The hide, when removed, is buried for a few days so that the hair may come off easily when rubbed by the hand. Then the skin is turned outside in, dried and prepared. It is afterwards carefully treated so as to be made air-tight. The open ends of the limbs are fastened and closed securely, one being left open for inflating the skin. Thin tar, produced from the deodar, is poured into the skin, until it is thoroughly coated inside, then the skin is tanned by steeping it in an infusion of pomegranate husks. I actually saw men preparing floats, and it was an interesting process.

When the skin-float is wanted for use the waterman sits down and begins the slow and weary process of blowing it up. Fancy having to inflate a motor tyre in this way! And a bullock's skin is much larger than any tyre up among the

mountains. However, the men have large chests and great power of " wind " as well as of limb. The river " waterman " is the only waterman in the world who provides wind for himself!

Then the waterman carries his boat on his back as a snail does its " house," and it is launched. The waterman knows how to balance himself in the river, and how to use, with one hand, a short oar whilst he may also paddle with the other hand. It looks easy until you try.

If a heavy load has to be taken across a ferry two skins are used. The watermen are stripped bare, keeping only white cloths round the lower part of their bodies, and turbans on their heads. We were conveyed across a " luggage," and, fortunately, had an easy crossing. It happens occasionally, however, that a passenger gets a dip which is not as welcome an experience there as it would be if it happened at red-hot Lahore. I felt, as I went across the river on the bobbing and pitching skins, like an Assyrian traveller who was exploring an unknown world long before the river-boats were shaped out of wood.

Having wild country to traverse we had to hire carriers. Our luggage and Mahammed Yusuf's stock of things he bought and sold, were conveyed by the " Paharees " (hill-men) who had " Khaltas " on their backs. These " Khaltas" are conical baskets with flat bottoms, resembling somewhat the fish baskets carried by the fishwives of Newhaven, in Scotland. The " Khaltas " are strapped securely on the backs of the hill coolies who go " up hill and down dale," as if the "Khaltas" were as easily carried as humps are by hunchbacks.

In places where no " Khaltas " were, or could be carried we hired men with hill ponies. These sturdy little animals are very nimble and sure-footed. There are no roads in the ordinary sense of the word, even between villages, but only bridle paths which are not always seen, and some gorges have only goat-paths. I shiver to think of these goat-paths. The slopes we climbed were at times so steep that we had to imitate the hill-men by holding on to a pony's tail and allowing the little animal to drag us up, a thing he did cheerfully and as a matter of course. Now and again the intelligent

pony looked round as if to see if one was following on foot or on one's stomach. When it crossed a little gorge it just knew how to jump and swerve so that the man grasping its tail did not tumble or slip. They are truly wonderful and intelligent animals, with tails like steel ropes.

We were now well in among the Himalayas. The air was more than delightfully cool. It was at times, especially at night, somewhat sharp. Rain fell at least once a day, but almost every evening it cleared up and there were gorgeous sunsets. The weather changes rapidly here. At one moment the sky is blue as sapphire, then suddenly it darkens with heavy masses of clouds which send down a drenching torrent of rain. But as suddenly as it darkens the sky breaks and clears again, and everything glistens in dazzling sunshine.

Night comes on in great beauty, with stars of extraordinary lustre and vividness. I have tried to write poems about them. Moonrise is a wonder never to be forgotten. The silvery light sweeps into black valleys suddenly, as the moon leaps up over a sharp mountain ridge, like a gigantic, gleaming shaft of light from a searchlight. You see the moonlight sweeping rapidly along far below just like a breeze of light, unfolding hidden wonders as it goes.

It was pleasant to travel in moonlight, especially if the day had been stormy, and we had had to sleep in a cave with a fire burning. Great-coats were absolutely necessary, for it was often very cold. Our waterproofs were not much good by day, for the rain made them as useless as wet tissue paper in a few minutes, and at night they did not keep out the icy wind.

We were not free from rain until we had crossed, partly over, and partly through by way of gorges, the tremendous and marvellous Himalayas.

Words cannot convey the beauty and glory of these amazing mountains. You feel the silence, a silence that seems always to be sinking and growing more intense. When it thunders the echoes repeat the peals over and over again, until you are unable to detect real peal from echo. A thunder-cloud thus seems to bombard you with a constant barrage. Winds are quite ghostly at night, for you hear the

echoes of sudden blasts which sound very weirdly. A gorge seems to be a haunted place: now you hear groaning and screaming in the air above and the next moment low, echoing moans far below you, as if fettered dragons were growling in a rocky chasm and were flapping their wings in an attempt to rise.

As we went on it grew colder and colder, until I found myself wishing I had just one hour of Lahore. Snow fell frequently and sometimes the flakes looked as large as goose feathers. These accumulated rapidly until the sun came out and made water run in merry little streams over rocks and shingle.

Leh was now not far off, but we were still among the Himalayas, and in the region where the Hindu religion prevails. We reached a hillock sacred to a Hindu cult, and in this hillock, we were told, lived a Guru. Our Hindu coolies prayed there and made offerings of sugar, ghee, etc.

The sun was now shining brightly and the air was warm in this deep, pleasant valley, when slowly a snake crept out of the hillock. The pious coolies therefore returned and told us, with sparkling eyes, that the god had made his appearance in answer to their prayers. They also told us a legend about the gods having fled out of India chased by the demons of heat and drought. The gods took refuge among the Himalayas, where they placed serpents to guard the faithful who sojourned there, or went past on a journey.

On we plodded slowly, and it grew colder. Beyond the serpent-guarded area the scenery became wilder and grander. At times we had glimpses of glaciers glistening in the bright sunshine. We were high up now, and the country in this mid-Himalayan region was Lahoul.

Here we reached a river which we could not ford, and so had to cross by a suspension bridge made of ropes of birch twigs and basket-work. The bridge looked frail and a sharp gust of wind caused it to shiver, sway and make crackling sounds. Being old, as well as frail, it was undoubtedly dangerous, and we had therefore to go warily, for if one jumped to clear a hole one might make a very large hole indeed, and perhaps drop through it. I did not breathe

freely until I was safely across. The natives are proud of their bridge and seem surprised if one should venture to criticize it. "Is it dangerous?" you ask. "Certainly, sahib, it is dangerous, being a bridge. Whoever heard of a bridge that wasn't dangerous?" One could only laugh, especially when disbelieved after describing a bridge of iron.

There are few villages in this area. In suitable spots the patches of good soil are well cultivated, and women are the agriculturists, although it is not war time. These industrious women do all the work in the fields and in their houses, and as it is cold during digging time they have to wear ear-caps, as a protection against the biting winds that sweep down from the uplands of eternal snow. These women are not attractive. They grow wrinkled and haggard very quickly. Yet, although hard and constant workers they have the usual feminine traits. Hair-dressing is a speciality. They plait their locks over their scalps and the tails hang down their backs clasped with an ornament. In front they wear a broad cloth band adorned with bits of coloured glass. This covering is then drawn down behind and fastened by the clasp of the plait tails.

Most of the men are away all the summer transporting merchandise, but they spend the entire winter at home, obeying their wives and honouring them greatly.

The marriage customs are extraordinary. Each woman of Lahoul has at least two husbands. Some women have three or four. The only trace in India of this very much married state is in the sacred books of the "Mahabharata" —the "Old Testament" of the Hindus—which tells of a very charming queen named Draupadi, who had five brothers for husbands. The brothers are known as the Pandavas, and scholars believe they must have come from this hill district as conquerors in ancient times.

Another extraordinary thing about Lahoul is that it seems to have no definite religion. There are strange and mysterious ceremonies, but no organized or established faith, Religion seems to be a matter of personal or family fancy. There is more magic than religion for there are no gods, just a vague sort of belief in a something, in a Power, or

rather in Powers, which nobody can define or account for, and regarding which few are much concerned excepting when something is wanted. Then one kills a goat, or does something out of the ordinary, and feels good.

This district is on the edge of the Buddhist country. From here we plodded on along the Karakum range and reached the great upland plain of Kyang, the loftiest plain in the world. Here we saw the black tents of nomads who engage in hunting wild horses. The scenery is very savage and picturesque, and the air is cold. Snow fell on the first forenoon of our arrival, and in the afternoon when the sun came out and shone brightly it was comparatively warm.

Gradually, as we pressed onward, we drew nigh to the Leh province where Buddhist monks live in lonely monasteries on the ledges of cliffs and summits of rocky eminences.

We went through the Tung Lung Pass, and, having crossed a shallow, prattling stream, reached the village of Ghya. Here we saw wonderful Buddhist monasteries perched in quaint, and sometimes unapproachable places. To the loftiest of these monasteries the monks are pulled up in baskets dangling at the end of ropes. The rocks are beautiful, being of many colours and shades, and not so monotonous as they appear in a pen-and-ink sketch. On the ledges of a cone-shaped spire of rock we saw a group of monasteries. These were inaccessible as eagles' nests and we gazed at them with astonishment. Low, long buildings built of stone, and even roofed with stone, they would look quaint even if on the level of the valley. As it was, they seemed to have been lifted up on the crest of earth waves during an earthquake.

Each of the buildings is inscribed with the Buddhist motto:

OM MANI PADME HOM.

O Jewel of the lotus, Amen.

"How do the monasteries receive revenue?" I asked, and an informant, who smiled at my ignorance, told of the unfailing supply of everything needed by the pious, and

even of the important revenue derived by selling small stones, or bits of stones, from the buildings, which are treasured by pilgrims and carried away long distances. The supply of loose stones is easily kept up. In addition to the monasteries we saw a number of small cloisters, pyramidal in shape, where offerings are made. On these are painted the serpent-dragons of Buddhism. These are called Nagas, and are really identical with the dragons of China and Japan. These Nagas have three forms: (1) the serpent, (2) half-human and half-serpent, and (3) entirely human with serpents curled round the neck or in the hair. Various animals are sometimes combined with the serpent. The Naga is supposed to enter the Underworld through a well at which there is a holy tree. Offerings are made at these wells, and wishes are wished at them. If you wait long enough you are supposed to see a form of the dragon in the well, perhaps a worm or a fly. Then you are in luck.

We journeyed on through this strange land of Buddhist influence which links India with China in the religious sense, till one day we reached a most interesting group of sacred buildings on a steep and rugged hillside. The largest one was comparatively low down, the others were on ledges, the highest being the holiest.

In front of the lowest monastery was a row of sacred poplars, an inner row was formed by square towers with domes and short spires. The lower parts of the towers were painted white and a red stripe ran from base to summit.

The monastery proper had two or three storeys and an open quadrangle in the middle. Flags were fluttering on each corner of the building. As we drew near we saw priests clad in red robes, red being the sacred colour, pacing backward and forward, lost in meditation. On their heads were mitre-like caps placed well back. Their shoes were of sacred red, and each had a red rope attached to his girdle. Their heads were completely shaven.

On asking about the higher monasteries, we were told they had been abandoned on account of the cold. To these aged priests used to be hoisted up, and there they underwent great austerities, too great for human endurance, apparently.

I was specially interested in the praying-wheel which I had thought was a monopoly of Tibet. The cylinder was about ten feet in height and five or six in diameter. This one was turned by the priests, and was believed to be specially effective on great occasions. What tremendous prayers it must have churned out! Other praying-wheels were very small, and were propelled by water. Still smaller praying-wheels were carried in the right hands of monks and kept revolving as they moved about. These resembled the little "windmills" that children use as toys. So delicately were they poised that the least breath of air caused them to revolve.

It was at Ludak, the town we were bound for, that I had a chance of seeing the Buddhist monks fully engaged in their strange religious observances. These devotees come out in great force on occasion. It was a grand sight to watch, although a trifle noisy. The chief priest tinkled a bell, and, opening a book began to chant loudly and slowly. The measured lines were repeated by those immediately behind him and passed from row to row to the end.

Soon the chanting swelled into a very loud chorus, and amidst the roar of voices trumpets were blown triumphantly, brass cymbals were crashed like stage thunder, and bells jingled loudly through the confused din. Once or twice, as the procession drew near where I stood, I closed my ears with my fingers. The final crash of religious noise-making was contributed by two immense trumpets built into the monastery wall. According to popular Buddhistic belief they are blown by spirits. Visitors, like Mahammed Yusuf and myself, were, of course, convinced that the "spirits" were either monks with tremendous lung power, or manipulators of some mechanical contrivance like a bellows. After the trumpets had raised the noise to the highest pitch, the chanting grew gradually lower until, in the end, one heard only the humming voice of the old priest who was bringing the service to an end.

It was here, at Ludak, that my poor friend Yusuf died after a very brief illness.

It was here, too, that we had heard of an alchemist who

lived somewhere in this range of mountains, and was reputed to transmute baser metal into gold. Our guide spoke of him with such extreme awe that I gathered he must be a sage of very great sanctity, indeed a mahatma, as Theosophists would say. My curiosity was aroused, and I made further inquiries. These were met by the local village headmen with a show of polite nescience, and it was not until I informed one of them that I was anxious to meet the Master because I was myself a devotee of the alchemical craft that I made any headway. Had I been a European I would, of course, have got no further. But after a good deal of trouble, and a great deal of mystery, I was at last informed that the Master would receive me. So, at the end of a two days' tramp over the roughest country, I at last found myself in the spacious cavern where he pursued his researches.

The way to the alchemist's retreat was wild and rugged. We climbed, my guides and I, from the valley to a height almost inaccessible for our pack animals, to find, to my surprise, a valley almost upon a hilltop, above which the towering walls of the Himalayas rose for many thousands of feet. No one, unless he had known the way well, could ever have stumbled upon the entrance to the sage's cavern, hidden as it was not only by dark and giant pine trees, but by a jutting rock which rendered its mouth practically invisible. An uncanny atmosphere hung about the place. The air, so high up, was grey and raw, and the herbage sparse and dusty-looking. But it was in these grim regions, not so far from the snow line, that, as I was to learn, grew the plant which was capable of transforming base metal into gold.

Aruni—I suspect the name was an assumed one because of its ancient and classical connections—I found to be a pure Hindu of the Brahman caste, who had betaken himself to this isolated spot for the sake of the utter quiet and freedom from interruption it afforded. At first he received me with marked suspicion and reserve. But my early training in alchemy had begun at ten years of age in Afghanistan, under the eye of a devoted student of the craft, and my

subsequent researches in the literature on the subject stood me in good stead, for, after a rigorous examination, Aruni agreed to receive me as a pupil for a period of three months. I am convinced, however, that he would not have done so had he not been rather curious concerning the novel knowledge of the craft which I displayed.

He lived in the simplest manner possible, sleeping in the rear of the cave on a bed of dried grass, eating, at rare intervals, maize cakes baked over the embers of his furnace, and drinking water only. He looked askance at the provisions I had brought with me. But we were soon on excellent terms, and, after I had dismissed my guides, I bent myself to acquire the secret of his craft.

I quickly found that the Master pursued the alchemical art from no desire of wealth or common avarice. Rather he believed it, like the alchemists of old, to be a spiritual process, a means by which the restoration of Nature to her original perfect scheme might be achieved. But I would say quite frankly that my own ideas on the subject did not altogether square with those of my venerable teacher, though I carefully avoided giving him any grounds for suspicion on this head. Would that, as it proved, I had been able to conceal my material motives.

Let me briefly outline Aruni's alchemical philosophy. According to him the transmutation of metals was accomplished by a powder produced from certain macerated herbs. The more elaborate theories which I placed before him he brushed aside with contempt. Nature, he said, was divided into male and female, and in its operations like drew to like.

The original matter of metals, he assured me, was double in its essence, and consisted of a dry heat combined with a warm moisture. But he warned me against accepting these ideas in a purely literal and in other than a spiritual sense. "My son," he would say, "you must first purge the mortal eye before you can behold the real truth of these axioms, and that, I fear, with all your learning, you have not as yet accomplished." His words, alas, were only too true. Although attracted to the spiritual I must admit that the

material has not been without its allurements for me, and, as I listened to Aruni's theory of how metals grew in the bowels of the earth, I felt more and more that I was entering regions which, although ostensibly perspicuous enough in their atmosphere, were yet veiled for me in impenetrable clouds of allegorical obscurity.

The entire tendency of the natural kingdom, I was instructed by him, was towards the manufacture of gold, the perfect substance. The production of the baser metals was only accidental, and as the result of an unfavourable environment rendered inauspicious by malign forces. Metals were engendered by sulphur, which is male, and mercury, which is female, and the elements of all metals are similar, differing only in purity and proportion. The powder by which the baser metals might be metamorphosed into gold was the combination of the male and female seeds which beget the precious metal.

Aruni worked with copper, which he found most suitable for his purpose. With the powder manufactured from roots and herbs, he "purged" the metal for thirteen moons, as he expressed it. During this phase he spoke of it as being in its "black state," in which it must be dissociated from all impurities. Then he allowed it to "purify," after which it became "white." The next stage was "fermentation" or the "red" stage. Before it was applied to the copper the latter had also to be purified. But the ingredients of the mystic powder he would not confide to me, and indeed, at first, I did not ask him to do so.

On my arrival Aruni had been engaged in gathering the samples from which his powder was manufactured, and I resolved, if possible, to secure specimens of them in the raw state. I knew that to attempt to do so at first would be to court failure, so I watched my opportunity with extraordinary patience. By degrees the old man explained to me the several processes by which he purified the copper preparatory to adding the powder. He placed copper filings in a crucible over a charcoal fire, blown to a white heat by goatskin bellows worked by the feet. When it had

melted, he covered the crucible with clay, hardened it in the fire, and dipped the whole in salt water, in which it hissed and bubbled. After that it was allowed to stand for a couple of days, and then it was opened and the oxide removed.

Now was my opportunity to discover the kind of herbs with which he made the "powder of projection" as alchemists call it. But Aruni invariably gathered these at dawn, an hour when I was sleeping peacefully, dreaming of gold untold, and what I should do with it when I returned to London.

Once I lay awake all night, and when the Master arose and went forth from the cave at sunrise, I followed him cautiously down the slope to the valley beneath. Whatever description of plant it was he sought it took a great deal of finding, for only once within the space of an hour and a half did I see him pluck anything out of the ground. This he took back to the cave, reduced it to pulp in a mortar, mixed it with mercury, and then wrapped it up in a strip of linen, coating the whole with clay. He then let it dry, dug a hole in the ground, filled it with dried cow-dung gathered in the valley, and placed the alchemical ball in the midst of this, setting fire to the dry ordure with which it was surrounded, so that it might "bake." But he would not permit me a sight of the plant, either in its natural or macerated condition.

I felt by instinct, rather than knew, that the Master suspected me of spying on him, and little by little our relations became somewhat strained. Then one night I woke to find him bending over me. His face was within a foot of mine, and I could hear his breath coming and going in short, hissing gasps. Alarmed, I cried out, and raised my arms as though to ward off an attack.

"You called," he said. "What did you want?"

"I did not call," I replied angrily. "It is you who come spying upon me in my sleep, because you think I have penetrated your precious secrets."

"My son," he replied sternly, "your mind is vexing you. You are conscious that you have not acted according to the dictates of the sages."

Now to be informed at half-past three in the morning that

you have a bad conscience, and that you are not observing rules laid down by those long dead, is scarcely conducive to continued good temper. And I am sorry to say I lost mine.

"Dog of a Hindu!" I cried. "Who are you to teach morality to a son of Islam? You are nothing, after all, but a base empiric seeking to pose as a person of great sanctity and learning, and you are probably trying to work up a reputation as a mystic, so that you may arrange a lucrative lecture tour through the priest-ridden areas of the East."

To my amazement the old man grew suddenly dreadfully calm.

"I do not know what you mean," he replied with dignity, "and I certainly do not intend to quarrel with one from the outer world who has shown himself so grossly material as you have. As regards my ability to perform that which I 'pretend to,' that is my own affair. Enough for me to say that it was against my better judgment that I accepted you as a pupil, for, despite all your learning, it is clear to me that you have not yet shaken off the lures and attractions of the physical world, and that you do not understand the true spirit of the grand quest."

"I crave your pardon, Master," I said formally, "but you will admit that no one likes to be wakened suddenly from sleep, and disturbed as you have disturbed me."

"It is in sudden awakening that men reveal their true characters," Aruni replied sententiously.

This remark, I am sorry to say, made me laugh long and loudly.

"You talk like a book, as they say," I cried, shaking with merriment. "You are ridiculous."

"In books is wisdom," retorted Aruni. This latter speech proved too much for me. I roared in ungovernable mirth. The old man drew himself up, and I could see his eyes glitter in the light of the dying furnace.

"I do not believe you to be a brother of the craft," he said gravely. "None such would conduct himself as you have done. You may have picked up its rudiments from some incautious alchemist and you seem to have supplemented this knowledge by reading from those books which

members of the Brotherhood have through the ages seen fit to give to the world. But if you are so foolish as to believe that the grand secret is to be penetrated by mere mechanical or bookish knowledge alone, you err profoundly. Alchemy is an art of the soul rather than of the mind."

Now this speech nettled me, because I rather prided myself on my knowledge of the craft, although I must admit that I have never come within reasonable distance of its arcanum. Besides, a clever Afghan stratagem had entered my mind.

"You add vainglory to your other follies, Aruni," I said, haughtily. "Do you think that you alone are in possession of the grand secret? And what proof have I that you are? I have never seen you project the great experiment. Tomorrow let us compete according to our different methods in making the precious metal, when I will undertake to beat you on your own ground."

Of course, all this was mere bluff, but to my amazement Aruni became transformed, for alchemists, like actors, poets or musicians, are easily moved to anger by any hint of superiority, in method or attainment.

"What!" he almost shrieked, "you, a neophyte, dare to pit your prowess against mine! You are ten times more foolish than I believed! I know that you boast of what you can do, but I will show you, aye, even now, how absurd are your allegations regarding my powers or the lack of them. Rise, and come with me at once."

I bounded from my grass bed in a flutter of excitement, and we made our way to where the crucible of prepared copper stood beside the furnace. Aruni lit a resin torch, removed the clay lid, and thrust the vessel beneath my nose.

"You see," he cried, shaking with anger, "it is merely copper, is it not?"

"True," I replied, "and copper it is likely to remain."

He made no reply, but went to that part of the cave where I had suspected he kept his stock of prepared powder of projection. He returned to the furnace and broke open the clay ball in which the powder was contained with a hammer. A fine, rust-red, calcined powder lay within, for all the world like oxide of copper. Then, heaping the char-

coal on the furnace, he lifted the crucible of base metal and placed it on the fuel.

"Blow the bellows," he commanded curtly.

I did as he bid me, and soon a steady glow resulted. He brought another bellows and we both trod steadily on the goatskin, working side by side in sullen silence. In about a quarter of an hour the copper began to run, perhaps a couple of pounds of it, and then grew red and molten.

Aruni peered into the crucible, and ordered me to keep on blowing. Then, taking a pinch of the red powder of projection, he cast it into the crucible and he continued to blow too into the molten metal through a long nozzle, after the manner of the Indian goldsmiths. But gradually a subtle change stole over the surface of the metal. From a deep cherry-red, it became first green, then blue, then violet, and I could see that some profound chemical change was taking place. At last the old man lifted the crucible from the furnace with a pair of tongs, laid two stones side by side and poured a spelter of the molten metal between them. As it cooled he removed it, and poured another and another until the crucible was empty.

"See!" he cried, triumphantly. "Is that gold, or is it not, fool that you are?"

I lifted one of the spelters with the tongs. It was a rich straw-yellow, the colour of the finest gold.

"It looks like gold," I admitted, my pulses pounding with the age-long instinct of man for the precious metal, "but how am I to test it? Have you any nitric acid by which I can try its virtue?"

"I know nothing of your barbarous methods of trial," he replied wrathfully. "I tell you that what you look on is sovereign gold of the first standard. Are you not content?"

By this time the metal had cooled sufficiently to permit me to handle it. It certainly looked like gold, and as certainly it was not copper. I placed it on one of the stones and pounded it with the hammer. It at once displayed the extraordinary malleability of finest gold.

"I believe you, Master," I said, abashed. "Forgive me, I spoke in haste, I am sorry and ashamed."

"And well you may be," replied the sage. "See the sun is rising. It is another day. Go now, and return not to this place. You have been a fool, and must suffer for your folly in a manner which you shall regret all your days."

In vain I begged, entreated to be allowed to remain, even in the humble capacity of a servant, a mere assistant. Aruni was adamant. Nor would he give me even the smallest particle of the gold, or the least pinch of the powder to carry away with me. Indeed he scarcely addressed another word to me, but turned his back upon me with every sign of contempt. There was nothing for it but to go, and a sense of having done an injury to one whom, at heart, I really respected has restrained me from returning at any time.

But that I saw gold made in that Himalayan cavern I then profoundly believed. That I had beheld the actual commission of the great act, the unveiling of the grand secret, without comprehending its process, and not once but a thousand times since did I curse the folly and cupidity which ruined my chance of ever acquiring a knowledge of the formula of the arcanum. You of the West may smile at my story and disbelieve it. All I have to say in reply is that it contains nothing which is not the truth. But there is a sequel.

As I thought then, it might be, as Aruni declared, that alchemy is in reality a craft of the spirit. But what I witnessed appeared to me as a purely physical experiment, and I could only conjecture that alchemists throughout the ages have veiled what is actually a purely chemical process by mystery and allegory. At the same time, I wondered why Aruni and his like, if they really manufactured gold in sufficient quantities to bring them a fortune, did not take advantage of the material comforts which wealth brings in its train. To what purpose did Aruni employ his wealth? Did he merely bury it in the earth in the assurance that he had assisted Nature in returning to her pristine state of perfection?

During the twenty years and more in which I have studied alchemical science, I have encountered so many divergent viewpoints that, frankly, I am bewildered. Probably, as Aruni said, I am not sufficiently far advanced on the

spiritual road to comprehend these mysteries and allocate them into one perspicuous and homogeneous code of simple truth, as he then seemed to have done.

But for the sequel. A full three months must have passed subsequent to this event, and my experiences with the alchemist had been crowded out by much tramping, for I was then working my way down to the borderland of India. At any rate, on a particularly hot evening I sat with the English Superintendent of Police when his men reported the arrival of a gang of coin counterfeiters with the Hindu Pilgrims from the Himalayan uplands. The police officers sought the permission of their high official before arresting the offenders, especially because the head of the gang was reputed to be a " holy man " who could transmute baser metal into gold, in addition to being able to sit for hours on a bed of spikes.

Believing this to be one of those matters which sorely try an English official every day of his service in India I gave no further thought to the affair, although my curiosity was certainly excited. But when, some weeks later, I was again dining with the same official I asked him about the case of the " holy man."

" Oh," he said, " it was a unique case. The man posed as a fakir of great sanctity, tracing his ancestry from the Clan of the Moon itself. He used to melt the copper, and when that metal was a mass of molten red, he asked his disciples to blow the goatskin bellows hard, whilst he himself, pretending to increase the flame by puffing through a long nozzle, passed small balls of pure gold, concealed in his mouth, through that nozzle into the copper, and when sufficient gold had been added to the metal in the crucible he used to proclaim that elixir had been added, and that transmutation had occurred. The gasping crowds thereupon used to place their offerings before the alchemist. Later he counterfeited coins also."

This brought very vividly to my mind the art which I had sought in the Himalayas, and I felt intensely interested to see the alchemist. My astonishment can therefore be better imagined than described when I saw the selfsame alchemist, Aruni, of my experiences on the Roof of the World, behind the bars of the prison cell.

Men-Eaters and Others

Ajmere in the heart of India, above all places, is the greatest meeting-place of Moslem pilgrims, for a celebrated saint's shrine attracts the high and the low of the East to it. To Ajmere it is the desire of all the devout sons of Islam to repair when in India.

When we besought the shelter of a sarai in the rain it was already overcrowded.

More water descended from the thatched roof than it poured from the sky. Qurban Ali, the retired Indian official, now a full-fledged pilgrim, and I sat on one cot, trying to keep ourselves as dry as conditions would permit, whilst a cell was being swept for us on the other side of the vast courtyard of the serai.

The aged Qurban Ali went to see how long it would be before we could get in to where we were promised a shelter for the night.

When my fellow-companion pilgrim did not return till they were lighting the crude-oil lamps that looked like old Roman lamps made of baked clay, I went to see what had happened.

Qurban Ali had foregathered with an old friend—another pilgrim from up country. Perched high up over his bundles and tin trunks and sacks of luggage sat Qurban Ali's friend. A less likely person for pilgrimage you could not have imagined.

A man of wide scholarship, a much travelled man, and who had been a research student at more than one European University, Qurban Ali's friend had now renounced the world and had taken to visiting shrine after shrine.

But the immediate object of their interest was the story which he was relating to the bewildered Qurban Ali about an old University friend of his. It was a story of his journey to Europe and his meeting with a man who had turned cannibal, and his stories of two others of his companions were equally remarkable.

These are the stories to which we listened:

Ever since the gangway was lifted at Colombo, and I saw the sunburnt visage of a middle-aged Englishman under a particularly worn topee, I had thought that I knew the man. Constantly I had come face to face with him when the steamer ploughed its way through the open seas towards Aden. Beyond a side-glance this curious and aloof man defied acquaintance. But something fascinated me about my fellow-passenger—he had almost an occult influence on me. One night when the stars hung from the sky in bunches like giant and glowing pieces of the moon, that enchanting scene so gripped me that my coffee cup slipped from my hand; it rolled over the railing and it fell in the lap of someone sitting in his deck-chair. The sleeper woke up with a start, as if from a trance, and as I hastened to apologize, my eyes met the same mysterious silent man, who, I thought, had been making an extra effort to avoid me.

After profound apologies, I resolved to take the opportunity. "Pardon me," I said, "but have we not met before?" The man looked up. "Yes!" he grunted, "yes, perhaps we have met in the moon." That grunt of his—a little mannerism as it was—flashed a host of memories. It emboldened me. "We have not met in the moon, old boy," I spoke half humorously. "Come, come, Charlie, do you forget that Pathology classroom?" He had stiffened ever so slightly, then he gave it up, and the whole association of our undergraduate days we recounted.

He had failed twice in his finals; the professor had been hard on him, he thought. The War came on, he served in the Army, and then after a little love affair, went to the East to lose himself. But now he was returning. He did not want to know any of his old haunts. Whether Muriel had gone to Canada or had married someone else he did not care. He just wanted to spend a quiet summer in England after a dreadful time in the wilds of Ceylon.

Not till the steward was putting out the lights did we realize that we were on the wrong side of the deck, where ladies slept. But Charles Munro, though this is not his real name for obvious reasons, besides being a good all-round cricketer, and a mimic of his national bard, was also a good

story-teller. What he began to tell me of experiences in the back of beyond interested me so much that we went to the men's side of the deck. Within ten minutes we too had brought up our mattresses on the deck, and I was once again listening to him. "You did not stick long to your botanical researches?" I asked. "Well!" he said, with that Scottish drawl which was characteristic of him, "well you see, I got into a sort of man-eaters' business." "Man-eaters! Good heavens! You were not amongst the cannibals!" Now what he related brought him as close to being a man-eater as any civilized man wishes to be. And it was as well for him that the spell was broken.

It transpired that he had qualified in some way or other in pharmacology in Kandy, and by way of research, he had sailed forth to collect some herbs, which the natives thought would cure malaria. One day he set out in search of those unchartered regions of the island which even the aeroplanes have not been able to penetrate. Charlie was desperate; he did not care what happened to him. He would be an explorer, a discoverer of herbs that would free mankind from fever. But now I must let him use his own words.

"Desperately," he said, "I wandered on, the terror of the jungle on me. It was unnerving and paralysing my volition. I was indeed lost in these endless and pitiless leagues of enveloping greenness without hope of exit or rescue. Fool that I had been not to take the advice of my shikari! I did not know Ceylon; I had not bargained for such conditions as I now found myself in. Beaten, exhausted, I floundered on mechanically, my rifle feeling as heavy as the beam of a house on my tired shoulders.

"Suddenly I heard the baying of a hound in the distance. The sound, menacing as it was, aroused my flickering hopes. It would, if followed up, lead me out of the labyrinth in which I was weakly floundering. Again the deep baying sounded on the calm evening air, then, as if the whole of Hades had broken loose, it was succeeded by a chorus of such infernal barking and yelling as I had never heard before. The furious din checked my progress; I halted and listened. Would it be safe to proceed in that direction? It would

certainly not be safe to stay where I was, and the hubbub, threatening as it sounded, would at least lead me out of my perilous position—to land me in a worse one, perhaps. Well, I had come to the end of my tether and had no choice. I decided to 'face the music,' and pressed on in the direction of what seemed to be a pack of hounds let loose and hot on the track of their prey.

"Then, suddenly, I stopped dead once more, for the awful thought had occurred to me that I myself might be that 'prey,' the object of that clamorous quest. Even as I halted, I noticed that the jungle had grown less dense. Pressing forward, I emerged all at once into the bright sunshine and in view of a strange picture.

"In a clearing between jungle and jungle, an island of plain between two seas of forest, stood the most incongruous building it has ever been my lot to see—yes, actually, for this is not fiction, but absolute fact. Think of a mediæval tower cast out of England or Normandy into the midst of a Cingalese landscape! On one side of it stood a long low building, evidently kennels, and issuing from this I beheld a pack of some twenty large hounds of a breed I was quite unable to place. No two of them were alike and I judged them to be mongrels between the bloodhound and other large breeds, at least many of them had undoubted bloodhound characteristics. I have seen such dogs in the Portuguese towns of India, and I have reason to believe they had been brought from Pondicherry.

"Behind them stood a curious figure, a white man in striped pyjamas, the trousers of which were tucked into long, laced-up field-boots. He wore a solar topee, and at that distance I could not see his face. But I was not occupied at the moment with personal idiosyncrasies or appearances. The hounds, sighting me, gave full cry, and came at me like a speckled wave.

"'Look out,' I yelled, raising my rifle, 'if your dogs attack me, I shall shoot—and it won't be at the dogs.'

"Their master heard, even at that distance, and snapped out an order. Instantly the brutes came to a stop, whimpering and whining like a horde of disappointed wolves. I

walked slowly towards the man with the solar helmet, and now I could see his eyes—curious eyes they were, eager, strained and bloodshot, the restless eyes of a debauchee it seemed to me.

"'It's late for hunting,' I said, 'but your hounds have got me out of a fix. I was lost in the jungle.'

"'Several people have been lost there,' he replied in strange but cultivated tones, although with a strong foreign accent. 'That's why I bring the dogs out. They have . . . er . . . rescued not a few wanderers.'

"'That's a queer house of yours, if you'll excuse me for saying so,' I ventured. 'Quite like the ogre's castle in a fairy tale, isn't it?'

"'Ogre's castle,' he repeated. 'You think so? Well, you're all in, I expect. You had better come inside and lie down for a bit,' and turning and whistling to his dogs he led the way to the tower. Within, it was comfortable enough, and had evidently been made suitable to tropical conditions. The ground floor was the living-room; two airy bedrooms composed the second storey. As to the third, I only saw it once.

"I learned that my host's name was Kreimer, or so I shall style him. He was a heavy, cumbrous-looking man of an obviously lazy habit, about fifty perhaps, fleshy and unwholesome. His only servant was a Cingalese, a creature of quite extraordinary suavity.

"But I was in no case to quarrel with circumstances, and after an excellent supper of curry which might have been cooked in the best club in Calcutta, I was shown to my room and slept like a man in a legend. And while I slept I dreamed—nor were my dreams pleasant.

"They were rather chaotic and indescribable, those dreams of mine, but their central motif seemed to be a horrible unnerving sensation of constant rustling, to which the baying of the hounds played a menacing accompaniment. Rustle, rustle, the weird sound continued throughout the night, like the leaves of a wind-swept wood in June, and, even though I slept, I had a sensation of the nearness of bodiless presence which filled me with vague unrest. I

awoke unrefreshed and almost as weary as I had been the night before, but I washed and dressed, and descending, put the best face on things I could. Kreimer was in the living-room, and what I saw him do I did not like.

"At first I thought he was drinking a glass of wine. But when I drew closer, I saw to my horror that it was not wine.

"'Good morning,' he said affably enough, as he finished his drink. 'You seem surprised at the nature of my refreshment, but it's doctor's orders.'

"'Indeed,' I said most inadequately, wishing myself for some instinctive reason a thousand miles away from this man.

"'Yes, I find fresh blood wonderful as a morning pick-me-up,' he continued almost carelessly. 'Ever tried it?'

"'Good gracious no!' I retorted, suddenly angry, I knew not why.

"'But you drink milk, don't you?' he asked, as if surprised, 'and what is milk but white blood?'

"I made no reply, and we sat down to a breakfast of kedgeree and coffee, well served by his Cingalese man-servant. How it was I came to accept his invitation to stay for a week I cannot say. The man had a strange fascination about him, and I have always been strongly attracted by odd personalities.

"'This is a wonderful spot for cheetah,' he said, as he lit a cheroot. 'I course them with the hounds. Suppose we try our luck before tiffin? You won't need a gun, it's all dog work. Better start at once while it's reasonably cool, if you don't mind.'

"He had touched me on one of my weak spots. Of course cheetah are not hunted that way at all, but I was keen to see a new method. So in ten minutes he had routed out the dogs, and was waiting for me at the door.

"'By the way,' he said, looking at me strangely, 'the dogs aren't used to you, and I admit they're a trifle uncertain with strangers. Suppose you walk towards the jungle and watch the proceedings from cover. My man and I will drive them in the opposite direction, and as it's all flat

country hereabouts you'll get a capital view of the sport when we rouse one of the spotted fellows. What do you say?'

"I looked at the hounds, leaping, snapping, and snarling, and he didn't have to ask me twice. So, while he and his man held them on the leash, I made for the wall of trees about a quarter of a mile away.

"I had gone, perhaps, a couple of hundred yards when I heard the yapping and whining change suddenly to the noise of a pack in full cry. Surprised that they had already roused a cheetah, I turned. The pack, with baying heads and tails high in air was rushing in my direction!

"For an instant I stood stock-still, incapable of believing that I was their quarry. But a second glance sufficed to make it certain. The brutes were running towards me as if possessed, and Kreimer was waving them on with halloos and hunting cries as a man might a pack of beagles. With a sudden oath of terrified anger, I put down my head and dashed in the direction of the jungle at top speed.

"Well for me was it that I was a sprinter in those days, and in good form. One stumble, one false step, and I should have been done for. I had more than two hundred yards to make, and the brutes were not more than half that distance behind me when my warning came. I ran like a man who feels death clutching at his windpipe, sobbing, cursing, in a surge of frightful anger. My heart rose in my throat and half smothered me like the grip of an enemy. By the time I made the sheltering trees I was all in, merely reduced to a smashed and crumpled pair of lungs, drawing like a broken bellows. With the last of my frenzied strength I shinned up a tree and stared down at the howling brindled demons below me, leaping and frothing like maddened wolves. In another two minutes Kreimer had come up.

"'A thousand apologies, my dear young man,' he shouted, 'the brutes got out of hand. I simply couldn't restrain them.'

"'You devil,' I sobbed, 'didn't I see you driving them on, you infernal murderer!'

"'You're mistaken, I assure you,' he said suavely,

looking at me queerly, almost hungrily, none the less. 'I was shouting at them to keep them back.'

"'Tell your man to take them to the kennels,' I said, for I have something to say to you.'

"'Certainly, he'll take them back,' he replied, with a great show of willingness, and gave the necessary orders. At a word the hounds, which seemed to be absolutely under the domination of the Cingalese, trotted away behind him to the kennels. When they were at a reasonable distance I descended and faced Kreimer. But I faced a man with a revolver in his hand.

"He might have bristled with revolvers, but I was instantly at his throat. Then a strange thing happened. As I seized him, he crumpled up like paper in my arms, and slipped to the ground. I fell heavily on the top of him. His white face stared into mine. I knew he was dead as I looked into the glazed eyes.

"The heart had given away suddenly like a broken piston. Horrified and shaken, I called loudly to the Cingalese. At the third cry he came running to me. He bent over the face of the dead.

"'This is no marvel,' he said calmly. 'He was a bad man. The gods have slain him out of the sky. Maybe, some demon of the forest . . .' and he looked at me fearfully.

"'Help me to carry him to the house,' I said, and without another word we bore the body back to that strange tower which it had so lately inhabited.

"'Yes, he was a bad man,' babbled the Cingalese sententiously. 'He hunted other men.'

"'What are you telling me?' I gasped, overcome with horror. 'Do you mean to say the man was a . . . a . . . madman?'

"'No,' he replied gravely. 'He made me his slave and I had to obey. Strangers lost in the jungle came hither, he hunted them with his hounds, and then . . .'

"'And then what?' I asked, but received no reply.

"The thing seemed incredible. Entering the house, I went through Kreimer's papers. The man was Russian, a landowner, from the Crimea. His diary showed that he had

undergone the experience of a terrible famine. Perhaps that had . . . but such surmises are better left unwritten.

"I resolved to remain in the Castle until such time as some official came our way. Someone from the Woods and Forests Department would surely pay us a visit before long, I felt assured. I had nothing to fear. Kreimer had attempted my life and his death was due entirely to mishap, for I had scarce touched him. My conscience was clear. And, moreover, it was impossible to communicate with the authorities from that jungle-surrounded place.

"We buried Kreimer that evening in the compound, and I made up my mind to shoot every one of the hounds next morning. That night I slept not at all. I was conscious of the same rustling in my bedroom, a weird sound as of bodiless things moving in the darkness, so I rose and lit the lamp and smoked and read until dawn when I fell at last into an uneasy dozing.

"And now comes the most dreadful part of my tale. How it happened, I do not presume to be able to say, but, after a few days, I had no inclination to quit Cain Castle, as I came to call the strange tower in which I found myself. At first it was something resembling curiosity which detained me there, that and a resolve to await the coming of someone in authority to whom I could relate the truth of what had happened to Kreimer. But, after a few days, I began to feel with growing horror and dismay that I was becoming attached to the place, that, indeed, it held a weird kind of fascination for me. I grew tolerant even of the hounds, and felt more than disinclined to destroy them. After all. . . .

"It was on the fourth day, I believe, that I began to experience a new phase of this peculiar obsession, for that is the only word I can discover for it. The horror with which I regarded the place and everything connected with it had entirely disappeared, and I found that not only could I tolerate Cain Castle, but that I had even a relish for the tower and its surroundings. No longer did I dread the rustling noises in the darkness of the night. I felt, on the other hand, something almost companionable and friendly in it.

"My conscience seemed numbed and clouded. I began to feel as though my very personality were undergoing an alteration. I remember now with horror the ghastly change which crept over me in that accursed place, but at the time, if you will believe me, I experienced nothing of the nausea with which I now regard the unnatural metamorphosis which I saw gradually creeping over me, the new and vile character which invaded and enveloped my ego like a demoniac possession.

"It is difficult for you to realize the nature of the strange and occult influences native to that environment. Little by little the influence, the horror, grew upon me. Soon I was as a child in its grasp. I walked about like a man in a trance. The Cingalese saw the change and spoke warning words full of enigmatical meaning. He might as well have spoken to the walls around us. Some dark power immeasurably mightier than man had me in its grasp, soul and body. The baying of the hounds had become as music to me, and curiously enough, they now displayed no unfriendliness, but leapt with joy at their fences when I appeared, fawning on me and licking my hands.

"One cloudy morning, hot, mercilessly tropical, with the threat of thunder in the air, I rose, duller than ever in mind, and conscious of a craving which I could not describe to myself, a horrible physical craving, a wild hunger which was yet not of the nature of ordinary hunger, for the excellent breakfast the Cingalese placed before me remained untasted, arousing only nausea. Like a beast I stalked about the house, mooning from window to window. Ha, what was that! The hounds were baying wildly. Something within me, something unspeakably wild and savage, leapt tigerishly at the sound. I looked toward the jungle. A man in a white drill suit was staggering out of it, evidently in the same predicament as that in which I had found myself some ten days before. Then he seemed to disappear.

"I rushed upstairs to the top storey of the tower, the better to get a sight of him and his movements, springing up the crazy stone steps like a panther. A wild blood-lust

possessed me. I experienced the overpowering joy and triumph that the greater beasts must feel at sight of their prey.

"Behind me the Cingalese cried and babbled.

"'Sire, Sire, go not up there,' he pleaded. 'There is something there . . . something unholy.'

"The upper storey of the tower consisted of two rooms. So far I had only entered that on the opposite side, a room full of books, guns and hunting tackle. That which looked toward the jungle was locked. Now, in a frenzy of passion, I threw myself upon it. The crazy lock parted, and I was propelled into the place with terrific force. Stumbling to the cob-webbed window, I gazed through it with distended eyes, panting like a tiger behind bars. Ah, now I caught sight of the little white figure once again!

"The hounds! How they yelled! My impulse was to descend and turn them loose, to hunt, to capture, and then . . . even now, after many years, I turn sick and faint at the bare recollection of the ghastly desire which filled me with a tempest of longing. To seize, to tear, to bite—yes to bite, rich and deep.

"Something rolled dismally at my feet—turned and rolled on the rotting boards. I looked down. A human skull circled slowly on its fleshless dome at my feet!

"Then revulsion, horror, loathing, descended on me like a quenching flood, burning out the fires of the abominable ardour I had felt. I knelt beside that grim relic, my face buried in my hands, quivering with shame and self-aversion, a spirit newly escaped from some awful pit and limbo of ancient devilry in which I had languished for days of half-realized abandonment. What had I nearly become? With a cry I gazed around me. The room was literally stacked with human bones, the horrid trophies which Kreimer the man-demon, the cannibal, had garnered there as mementoes of his unspeakable orgies.

"Nearly beside myself, I rushed below, through the compound and towards the now recumbent figure at the verge of the jungle. I had scarcely run more quickly when pursued by the hell-hounds on the day of the unspeakable

Kreimer's death. The Cingalese followed me. We raised the fallen form, but it was lifeless.

"Two days later I was myself on the road to civilization, accompanied by the Cingalese. But before I went, I loaded every rifle and revolver in the tower—and then I entered the kennels and did what I had to do there quickly and mercifully. When the last of the demon-dogs had yelped out its life, I turned to the tower. The Cingalese and I gathered all the dry timber on which we could lay hands, and heaping it in the lower storey, I set it alight. In a couple of hours nothing remained of the Castle but the blackened walls.

"When I returned to Colombo, I set inquiries on foot, and revealed the outline of the history of the place. It had been built by an eccentric Englishman of means in the early part of the nineteenth century, an astrologer, who had retired to that remote district so that he might the better devote himself to the study of his mysterious art free from disturbance or interference. For at least a generation it had lain vacant and practically ruined until, some two years before the opening of my story, it had been found and renovated by Kreimer. The mysterious disappearance of explorers in such a country did not arouse any especial remark, as it was thought that they had perished in the neighbouring jungle, which possessed a particularly bad reputation as a wilderness easy to lose oneself in. At the same time it seems peculiar that the very considerable number of people who had gone amissing in that particular locality during Kreimer's tenancy of the accursed tower had not aroused suspicion."

When Charlie finished, I felt that I could not sleep. The very waves of the ocean seemed to be full of yelping, barking dogs. But he was asleep in no time. He needed it more.

The Confessions of a Khyber Chief

Now it takes days before you can forget such experiences as our friend Charlie related; and not till we had passed Port Said, did I regain enough balance to request the man of the Khyber to relate his pet story: "And why not my own life-story?" he asked. Here it is in his own words; and it is refreshing to note that he still is the true son of the soil even after his education in Europe.

When a gun barked a second time, I crouched behind a boulder. Only thuswise hidden could I see the scrub wood of the valley below where the fire had arisen. The third bullet from my unknown assailant now sang past almost my left ear. And then I, Abdullah Khan, did wroth, for what play was it anyhow to snipe a lone man, Khyber Pass though it be?

Cowering a little more, I steadied my gun; for of a truth, I had a gun, a fine one too, which only the other day fell from the hands of a Feringhee in Peshawar, when an Afghan blade sank in the breast of the English guard.

He fired again, then I: once more he replied and I obliged; now the unknown sniper's lead fell too wide, the firing was not so frequent, and I lay with mine cheek glued to the butt of my Jazil rifle. Not long did I wait, when he again sent a bullet, but this one was from a greater distance, another still from farther afield, and I believed that the raider was covering his retreat after the manner of men of Turkestan; but swearing by the beard of the holy Pir to have nothing less than the blood of that hidden coward, I leaped down from behind one boulder to that of another. Even as I jumped I fired at the mah. And lo, now a hand shot up, a fist trembled, and then, even though I waited longer than it takes to count the ninety-nine names of Allah four times, nothing moved in yonder thicket.

But the guide of the Khyber robber is of Satan. This man pretended to be wounded, a step too soon in chase is a step nearer death: yes, an ignoble death at the hand of a vile one who battles not in the fashion of men of a warrior class of

Afghanistan. So, I waited, waited, too long, for the wretch must be slain; even as a rock lizard I crawled on my belly towards him. Every moment expecting an attack; but no sound came, silence filled the valley, save a boy away in the bend of the Pass driving kine home, as the waning sun tipped the crest of the rocky defiles. Span by span I neared my target, till my eyes fell upon a hidden form.

"Rise and wield thy weapon," I spat, "with crouching cowards Abdullah battles not, rise and fight, is dagger thy weapon?" The form moved not a bit, and then did I wroth again. This son of dog angered me, even now he wishes me to sink mine knife in his side, so that men in the valley should laugh in their beards that Abdullah slew one who rose not to battle, and heap shame upon mine house. "Rise!" I roared even like the thundering cloud, "rise, Oh! the son of an unabashed father."

An arm moved a little. Maybe he is reaching for his knife or a revolver. But it fell limp on the stones. Then I stooped, and the shame of the Heddes was upon me. Abdullah, young and gay, blue of blood and a warrior whose praises were in the mouth of all Khyber men to do this!

Nothing short of the hoof of the Evil One must have crossed my path when I fired, and wounded this lovely woman.

Even as I gave praises to Allah for the shelter of her outer courtyard, I heard the gates of the village close, for men were returning from the evening prayers. "Sit a while yet," she said, "my father the Khan knows nothing of my escapade." So she rode above to shoot me, I was beginning to get wroth. "If thy heart did not incline toward me for marriage," she said adjusting her bandaged arm, "why dost thou fly towards the Feringhee country? To get a wife from Hindustan?" She laughed cynically drawing her veil tighter round her face.

Now, men's wagging tongues I would slit, but women's? Still, could I not have my private affairs as my own concern? If mine uncle, who reared me as a son, and being a chieftain was overmuch friendly with this girl's father, also a chieftain, I could not see eye to eye with either of them to have me

wed unless I wanted to. True also that I was fast growing to an age when many men have two or even four wives, yet nothing will induce me to tie myself to women. A warrior like Abdullah Khan should seek a mate of equally sturdy material as he. This and much else flashed through my mind, but I said naught to her, for her arm was sore and rough riding behind me had not improved her wound.

Yet, this woman mouthed a taunt. She actually hinted that I, Abdullah, who turned away many men with rifles, fled from women. And worse, sought a wife of Hindu country. Oche! and I spat. The girl was now behind the curtain. "Tarry a moment, I shall have speech with thee," I spoke. "Thinkest thou that I flee from women? In Allah's presence, I say it, thou may be right, for I flee from all thy kind that are not of tough mettle. Hindu wives I do not seek. They are fat, soft and greasy; even with a dowry I shall not tie one to the lead of mine horse. And wed thee I shall not. Thou crumplest even with a single bullet—however unknowingly that may have been fired—thou art yet a woman." Then I heard the Khan's booming voice from within. "Daughter, come hither, go to thy apartment, thou lookest tired."

That night as I saluted the priest seeking a night's rest in the village mosque, he looked at me curiously, but he recognized me not: for this Mullah, like others, must have known that my chieftain uncle required my presence, so that I may be wed, or at least sent to a college where they teach the craft with books. This priest, like the rest, must have known that whoso brought me home will get a hundred gold pieces from my doting uncle, for he called me the Light of his Eyes.

With these two wishes of my chieftain uncle I did not agree. "He is but a youth," he smilingly said to a group of clansmen, "he will come back from the valley soon enough." But the Elders had guessed it aright. "Newly he may have come to man's state, O Khan," they said, "but we had known Abdullah's father longer than thou." For had he not lived in the Feringhee country of Hindustan for over a generation, till my father's death compelled him to return

home as a leader of the Akal Zai warriors till I was ready to sit in my father's place?

Yes, the Elders were right, for even at the death-bed of mine father I had refused his advice to betake myself a wife. Its reason I have already given, a warrior I shall be, and warrior shall my wife be. Till I find one like that, I shall wait. Not that my uncle was unaware of this, but he had, I think, lost some of the fire and warmth of Afghan blood by his residence in the Hindu country. And then he had thought me a fool to have run away from home at the mention of a wedding, especially as the neighbouring chief's daughter loved me with the raw passion of the Khyber hills.

Late that night I sat in the mosque before going to the adjoining cloister for travellers, and long I thought of many things. Of a sudden a plan leaped in my head. My father had wished my marriage, he had also wished my going to a college. Why should I not take the lesser evil, and go to be pestered by books; it was better by far than to be pestered by women. Also at a college the teachers might have fine weapons, it would be a chance to possess a good one then: but do the Hindustani teachers have weapons? I wondered.

The night guards were letting themselves down by ropes from the watch tower when I was waiting for them in the morning to open the gates: and as the village kine lurched to their pastures, I was already riding hard to my home. How would the Khan of this village pull his beard, if he knew his prospective son-in-law to have stayed at a mosque as a common traveller after having wounded his daughter? And I laughed with the thought of it.

Soon the news of my return spread through the village. Already the clansmen were discharging their guns in the public square to welcome me. Wrapped in their great posteens of lamb-skin, the Elders now confabbed with my chieftain uncle. Post chase a delegation must now proceed to the other village to seek officially the hand of the daughter of that Chief in marriage to me. My return meant to them a proof of my complete surrender.

But my uncle, to whom I had spoken immediately upon my return, knew me to be of a different mind. He shall

send me to a college he had agreed. "To the young and old, greetings be," so my uncle raised his voice to the clansmen. "This is, as you know, your future chief, for a snow-white beard means nearness to Allah's Durbar."

Then he announced his intention of sending me to be educated, even to a farther off country than Hindustan. Even to the land where none but the Feringhees lived. Again and again he extolled the value of the book knowledge, and miracles of science which the Feringhees knew. But the Elders shook their beards. None had gone from their midst to the soft life of books. Theirs has always been the craft with the gun and the tulwar, what good their future Chief will be to them with book knowledge, for had they not seen the ill-fed Hindu scribe sitting on his haunches in the Peshawar bazaars, a product of books? Could such lead the warriors of Akal Zai? No, thuswise it has not been in our highland story.

"Do not belittle knowledge," shouted my uncle, "which of you can make the Devil-Devil-Machine that flew in air and threw sacks of gunpowder and blew up a whole mulberry avenue of our village? Forget ye that the Feringhee has the books wherewith he makes such and other things? Why should one of us," he asked, "especially your future chief not beat the Feringhee at his own game?" The mention of aerial bombardment impressed the clansmen enormously, and within the next two days I sat in the verandah of a hotel in Peshawar waiting to go to England for education.

Two things above all distressed me. One was that I was not allowed to carry any firearms, and secondly that the braces that kept my trousers up made me extremely uncomfortable. The whole outfit of mine was now new and of Feringhee make. Even the English tongue which my tutor had taught me began to be of some use, when I spoke to the station master at Peshawar.

In the fire carriage, which I had learned to call railway train, I felt that I was already in the land of the Inglis, for in the first-class compartment which was to take me to Bombay there were cushioned seats even as in our guest house, and a Frenchman had likened our divans to European sofas. But

there was a Feringhee as my fellow-traveller, and this I much disliked, for he drank the fermented juice of grape and often ate the flesh of pig, both of which are prohibited to the faithful Moslems like myself.

The eater of pigs has little shame left, I recollected our Mullah once say, and when this Feringhee emerged from the bathroom with a short pair of trousers which did not cover his knees, I thought of what the Mullah had said. And from the bottle he drank much: not did he talk to me for hours, but read all the time.

At last I spoke even in his own language to the Feringhee, and inquired the price and make of his revolver. A smile played in his eyes as he replaced it carefully under his pillow, and much indeed did I wonder whether he read men's mind, for I loved to possess that weapon.

Even if I slay him for the sake of his revolver, I shall only be killing an infidel, I thought, but what shall I do with the weapon here in this tame country where the people went about with bared legs, and were in that sense as shameless as this Feringhee. Another thought dissuaded me to dispossess my fellow-passenger of his goods. He was one of the "People of the Book," was his sacred Bible too not sacred to us the Moslems? Above all, his being a soldier sweetened my mind towards him. If he goes to battle in France, he is a warrior, even as warriors of our clan; and fighting men thus are fellow-craftsmen. On what side they were is of small consequence, for the fact that they are engaged in a business of killing or being killed is all that mattered.

Have I myself not been valued in the Khyber because I tossed with death and laughed at the face of Israel? So this man must live, I resolved he would even be my friend, and so nursing my Afghan knife, I slept, though on the upper bunk lest the Feringhee attacked me at night.

Next day my fellow-passenger and I talked long, and I told him how I planned to slay him, and why my hand tarried. He laughed and paid little attention to it, but admired my sentiments about not slaying the fighting men. His speech was of a different tone to what other Inglis had:

and then he told me that he was no new soldier, but a long line of warriors his kinsmen have been, for he came from Inverness in Inglistan, and that his early history has even been like our own Afghan days of clan battle. And then did mine heart warm to him, and I did thank Allah for not having killed a man whose folk were even like the warriors of Afghan hills. But he drank too much of the prohibited grape juice, and this I did not like. Maybe the drinking water in India was not so good as in his native glens, people so said, and thus he explained his love of the bottle.

At Bombay three giant ships waited for soldiers, a fourth was for ordinary passengers, and even in this they could scarce give me room if my Feringhee friend had not pushed my claims. There was a big war on, they said, and everybody sailed at his own risk. Fools indeed they were, for risks of life always spurred me on to try the adventure all my days, and gladly did I board the ship on that score.

But hardly had this city afloat moved out of the harbour than I felt a malady come upon me. It stole upon me unlike anything I had known before. A choking feeling even worse than headache, worse even than giddiness trickled down my throat. Quickly did I enter my cabin, and casting off my English clothes slipped on my voluminous trousers and loose shirt, then I lay down. The disease now had me well in its grasp, my head swam, and lo, in a trice I emptied my stomach; again and again did I do this thing, and I felt weak and faint with exertion worse than the day when a bullet wound made a hole in my side. Dazed I was, when someone knocked at my door. "Are you coming for dinner sir," he said. The thought of food brought the forgotten disease back again, and, frenzied with its oncoming, I grasped my knife to slay the man who spoke. But no voice came again, and I dozed off.

How long I had slept I knew not, but many times did I hear faintly many men call me for breakfast, food for midday and at sundown, but I could reply them nought; till one day I woke with a soapy taste in my mouth. I drank a whole bottle full of water, and donning my English dress struggled up to where many Feringhees sat up on the deck.

It was that same Kaftan friend, whom I now knew to be Captain Macdonald, that rose to meet me. He had some fruit brought for me, some pears and biscuits. Pears I enjoyed, for they were like our own Kabul pears, but the biscuits I did not touch, for the Mullah had said that the Inglis mixed pig's fat in biscuits and soap. But wonder of all was that the Kaftan had a woman of his race sitting beside him. Like others, she also was unveiled, and I often said to myself how does the soldier suffer this woman when he introduced me to his wife, to be looked upon by other men. If other women were of small importance, they were not wives of warriors, for warriors are of a superior class according to our way of thinking. But Captain Macdonald soon made me wise by saying that all went about like this in Feringhee country.

As the ship glided through the Suez Canal I saw the land of Arabia on both sides of it. But my Inglis friend spoke little of the war, nor was I much interested till after Port Said, by which time the feeling of the ship had left me, and I began to eat more, more than I did even in mine own hills, for much fruit they gave me because their unseasoned Feringhee food I did not care for. Neither did they drink our green tea, and their coffee was unlike the coffee which our Arab servant used to make at home.

I was thrilled to see the wonderful blue colour of the ocean of Mediterranean, blue and clear it was and placid, miles and miles of it, even larger than the whole of Afghanistan. The sight of it did not interest other passengers to the same extent. Often they looked through their glasses over the crest of the waves, and felt anxious. From the Chief Officer they often asked about the war. Then it came to me like a shock. That there was a war on in France, I knew, but is war not always on in our own land, so what of that: but when I was told that white men fought against white men, that Inglis fought other Inglis, used the same aeroplanes against each other as they did against us in the Khyber Pass, then did I wonder much. Were these Inglis mad? But what was even worse that they blow up ships even as our mulberry avenue was blown up by the Devil-

Devil-Machines. The ways of Allah none can fathom, I thought. Perhaps thuswise He wills to punish these people, and nothing of this did I say to the Inglis Kaftan.

Daily, as our ship drew nearer Europe, the anxiety of the passengers grew more intense: but of this I thought little. On the third night of our entry into the Mediterranean, I went to bed earlier than usual. Full two dreams must I have had when I felt myself thrown out of bunk, my head striking the opposite rails. As I was rising, a second lurch sent me banging against the railing again, and yet again.

Voices now I could hear in the corridor, men shouting, whistles blowing, women and children shrieking, all running up the stairs. Almost without knowing where I went I followed the rest. "Oh! it is sinking, hurry up, hurry up." they shouted. And then I knew.

From the deck boats were being lowered. Women and children sat shivering in the rescue boats, their teeth chattering. A woman clung to the legs of her husband; weepingly she sought him to step into the boat with her. He will not go, but handed an infant to his wife, for this Feringhee, like others, did not go into the boat before women.

A third boat was launched, and a fourth. Then like a thunderbolt something exploded on the edge of the giant ship, and I was thrown off my feet. Two children and a woman lost their hold and I saw them disappearing down in the waves. "Oh! Allah," I could not witness the scene as a small white hand immersed under the dark water below: then I prayed unlike what I have ever prayed. "Infidels though they be, O Allah," I supplicated, "yet they are thy creatures. Let thy mercy be upon them. O! Allah, the compassionate." And then did I curse myself for not knowing how to swim, for surely I would have brought that child out of the water.

A mountain of ocean now rushed on to the far corner of the tilted ship where the mine had struck, but the Officer of the ship still shouted command to his men like a general in battle, and his bravery filled my heart. Again the waves came and the ship was rocked to a decided angle, then four men sat beside me in the last boat that left the sinking ship.

Hardly had we moved a rifle shot when a demon of the sea rose to the side of the ship on which I had paced but a few hours ago. The water devoured it, bit by bit, inch by inch, till another deafening explosion sprayed the water around us and the ship was gone, and with it my Afghan knife. I felt the little bag of jewels round my neck with which I always slept, and sent thanks to Allah upon finding it still on me. And thus amidst the storm of war and shipwreck, I journeyed to the land of the Feringhees to be educated. It was a fitting prelude to what mine eyes were destined to behold in England, because there of love I saw much, of war not a little, for I am lucky in both.

The Princess who married a Wooden Effigy

The dream islands of Italy were now before us, when the Bengali gentleman was to give his story. It is a story of India's Golden Age; and thus the Babu Sahib began his tale originally from Darath Kumar-Ghosh in a style which retains the narrator's skill. I give it in his own inimitable words, fresh and glorious as they are:

The Great King was sick within his heart.

A hundred slaves came to him to tempt him with the joys of the palace, a hundred courtiers stood around his throne and proclaimed to him the glory of his whole ancestors, and a hundred wise men wagged their heads and prophesied to him his immortal fame.

But the Great King was sick within his inmost heart.

Then the royal physician sent for a hundred beautiful handmaids, and bade them sing to the Great King.

But that made the Great King worse rather than better.

Then in the second watch of the night, when he lay on his weary couch, the Great King bethought him of the Story-Teller that dwelt by the palace gate—the same that once before had beguiled his stricken hours and cured him of his sickness by wondrous tales.

"Tell me soft tales of love," he bade the Story-Teller, "and of the woes of lovers."

The Story-Teller knew what ailed his royal master. Great as King, he was but a man at heart—and a young man to boot. Perchance he had cast his eyes upon some beauteous maiden, but had found that the course of true love ran not smooth, even for a king. The sickness of the King was but that of the sickness of youth—heart-sickness.

Bowing his body until his head was upon the carpet, the Story-Teller answered: "Sweet are the pangs of love, O King, and the greater the obstacle to the union of hearts, the greater of ultimate bliss. For the true lover need never despair—if his love be great enough."

Thus the Story-Teller began these tales of the conquest of love. I, the faithful chronicler of the Great King,

listening from the other side of the royal couch, have here set them forth in such language as you may understand, O best-beloved readers.

. . . . .

O King of kings, it was once said by a sage that ambition is the infirmity of the great, and that the higher the greatness the higher the ambition. Then, how deep the infirmity that would imperil the lifelong happiness of one's own people for the sake of attaining the last pinnacle of that ambition!

Prince Anandapal of Kanoj had a serpent at his heart. Though the ruler of a vast domain, and far past the autumn of life, he was not satisfied. Like the miser that is ever greedy for gold, he was hankering after new power and glory. He had attained the height of his ambition in all things save in one, and that was enough to poison his joy in the other triumphs. In the land of the Seven Rivers there was none that was above him in rank and glory, save one—the young Prince Barath of Delhi, the last of the Children of the Sun. Prince Barath alone could claim a lineage more pure, more ancient, and thereby could claim the homage of all, even his.

Then Anandapal vowed within him to wrest from his young rival his birthright. He laid a scheme by which Barath must needs do him homage, not he to him. Having secured his rival, he would claim suzerainty over all the princes of the land of the Seven Rivers, and thus be satisfied for ever.

But, old in wisdom as in years, Anandapal veiled his purpose. As a friend he invited the Prince of Delhi to visit his capital and dwell with him for a time. And Prince Barath came with joy in his heart—all unconscious of the tricks of fate that might mar his destiny. Coming in friendship, he dismissed his brilliant retinue at the gates of Kanoj, and kept but a single member of his suite—a young Rajput cavalier that had been to him less a subject than a loving friend.

It was early dawn at Kanoj. The garden of the palace lay beneath his feet as Prince Barath stood at the window,

the day after his arrival, drinking in the morning air. Over against the window was the summer-house of the palace, wreathed in roses and lilies and champak that shimmered like a thousand gems in the dim, hazy light. Beyond the gardens to the east was a row of hills reposing in silent grandeur upon the bosom of the earth. Around him the palace slept.

Then out from the stillness the voices of the dawn spoke to him. From the jasmine grove beneath him some golden-throated bulbul sang to her mate a song of love: and the wandering mate, seeing the first streak of dawn upon the hilltop, flew back to the grove, singing of requited love.

Then, as Prince Barath heard that song, a sense of desolation swept over his heart, a sense of unutterable solitude that monarchs might feel upon their thrones. He was but a young man, a visionary and a dreamer, though in truth, a mighty prince.

For ten long years, since the dawn of his manhood, he had felt a strange craving at his heart. He had, indeed, had all that the world could desire, yet he had not been happy. He had felt that there was something wanting in his life, some great thing that he could not name or define, only feel.

With a sigh he turned to go, bowing to his fate, then stood still as one in a dream. Beneath his window and out of the summer-house there had arisen a vision of loveliness whose equal no man had seen, nor heard, nor conceived in his mind. It was a form such as a peri of Indra's Court might have possessed. Her oval face was of the clearest olive, her lips of the darkest rose, her eyes now shamed the gazelle's softness, now flashed a fire of passion that maidenhood could not suppress.

She was robed in the loveliest of brocade, it clung to her all round, and above its stars and moons there floated the gossamer lines of nine rows of pearls round her throat, slender Rampur bracelets clasped her wrists, and from each wrist there floated nine diverging lines of pearls, to converge again upon the necklace. Upon her left brow were the "frost-flowers" of Cuttack—a star of diamonds and rubies

radiating forty fringes of alternate pearls and diamonds down at her eyelashes.

And thus the wondrous maiden, that had come to him like a vision in a dream, stood there silent and stately. But a moment after he felt that she was not altogether stately, for there was something soft and clinging in her pose, some strange appeal in her eyes. Her head was bent slightly forward, as if awaiting some distant echo that was long returning, an echo of some sweet note that had already sounded in her inmost heart.

And, seeing that vision, something leaped to being in Prince Barath's heart, something that he had vaguely yearned for all his youth.

"Suvona! Suvona! my life's destiny!"

It was a cry of mingled joy and pain that broke from his lips involuntarily, a cry of passion that for ten long years had been stifled.

The spell was broken. She started, awaking from her dream. For one brief moment she met his gaze. What message went out to him in that gaze none can tell; what message of love, of hope—yet of fear, of despair, of vain regret. Then dropping her veil to her face in sudden confusion, she withdrew from the garden.

Within the hour Prince Barath laid his suit before Anandapal, her father. But, veiling his purpose, Anandapal smiled sadly, said that it was a great honour to the house of Kanoj to receive the homage of Delhi. For had not the oracle of Somnath sent forth a solemn decree—which no mortal man could gainsay—that "he who wedded the daughter must bend the knee to the father?" Verily the homage of Prince Barath was beyond his dreams!

And the lover? Something laid icy fingers upon his heart, something clutched it with a grip of steel, staying its beat, squeezing out its very life. Was it for this that he had yearned and hoped for ten long years? He saw a sudden darkness fall around him, and through it dimly realized that some monstrous fate had brought him there to mock him in the hour of new-born hope, of new-born love.

He turned away in sorrow. He was the guardian of the

honour of his house—its immemorial claim to the homage of all princes, even Anandapal's. He could not barter it away for his own happiness. In sorrow he returned to his capital.

Six months after there fell upon him a thunderbolt from the blue. Tidings came to him of the approaching bridal of the Princess Suvona. In accordance with the ancient custom, she was to take unto herself a husband in public assembly. What need to say that princes and potentates—aye, in the vanity of hope, chieftains and nobles—were flocking to her father's court. So rich a prize was well worth the vainest seeking.

But Prince Barath would not come. None but he was greater than Anandapal. All others would fain bend the knee to the father to gain the daughter. Alone among all princes, Barath would not come. Crushing his heart under an iron heel, he shut himself up in the innermost palace from the eyes of men.

Then at dead of night, when the palace slept around him, a swift-coming shadow passed into the chamber and knelt upon the divan before him, bathing his hands in kisses.

"My head be my sacrifice, Heaven-born, but I could not sleep in peace whilst my Prince was awake in thought." For it was Chand Singh, the faithful cavalier that had been with the Prince Barath in his visit to the palace of Kanoj. There, perchance, he had been an involuntary witness in the scene that held the secret of his Prince's heart.

Chand Singh raised his head from the divan and turned down the sleeve of his tunic, revealing a scar that reached from the wrist to the elbow. He bared his neck and showed the mark that a slanting tulwar had made from the shoulder to the skull. Then, still kneeling, he looked into his Prince's eyes, speaking in a voice that was strange and husky:

"Dost remember these, Heaven-born? Together we have been in the fray, and our swords have drunk of the same blood. Let me be in the fray with my master now. Does the Heaven-born understand me? My Prince staked his life for me that day in battle. Let me stake mine for him now at the bridal!"

He broke off suddenly and fumbled at his bosom. One by one he brought out from there various trinkets of gold and silver and ivory, weird-looking implements of steel, and strange mechanical devices of wood and brass.

"For fourteen generations I and my fathers have been warriors all, and have found favour in thine and thy fathers' eyes. But in my earliest childhood I was destined to dwell with the people, for she that nursed me as a foster-mother was a craftsman's wife and the daughter of four-score craftsmen, and the milk that I drank, and the skill that I learned were of the heritage of a hundred craftsmen."

Then, casting down his eyes at his master's feet, he murmured softly, "Does the Heaven-born understand me? Their skill is not all lost in me. I, too, may ply their trade—for the love of my Prince! Dost understand, Khodawund?"

Prince Barath awoke from his dream. A sudden light was breaking upon him. Dimly he saw purpose in his heart—the perilous scheme that would stake the life of his devoted follower for his own happiness.

"Enough, my brother!"—for in payment for such devotion he might call him his brother—"But stay! It will surely cost thee thy life! If they catch thee, thou shalt become food for jackals!"

"Life for life, Khodawund, my fate is written upon my brow from the hour of my birth. But one favour I beg: that the Heaven-born gives me full power in this matter, and himself carries out all things even as I shall arrange."

And, thinking a moment, the Prince of Delhi solemnly laid his hand upon the head of his subject, and promised to obey him in this matter, without a doubt, even to face death with him.

For it was Chand Singh's perilous mission to enter the very palace of Kanoj, and to undermine the plot of its master with a counterplot.

Meantime, all Kanoj was agog with bustle and excitement. It was to be the first bridal within the memory of its people. All along from the palace courtyard up to the ridge by the river bank a city of pavilions was arising, as if at the touch of a magic wand. Princes from Ulwar, Ajmere,

Ujjain, Muttra, even from Srinagar and the uttermost parts of Dakheen, were coming with all their gorgeous retinues to seek the hand of the Princess Suvona.

And the Princess Suvona, sitting at her window, watched the new city as it was built up beneath her feet and portioned out to her suitors according to their ranks. What was in her heart none could tell, what joy, or what sorrow, for she sat still and silent—as if her lifelong happiness was at stake. Her chief maid-of-honour, Priamvada Bai (the lady Priamvada), a maiden of her own age, reading her inmost heart sought to arouse her from her silence, for such indifference in a bride was of the saddest augury.

She pointed to the nearest pavilion on the right, all gay with white and blue and scarlet. "The Prince of the Nilghiros, the lord of a thousand elephants."

Then to the pavilion on the left, resplendent in silver brocade and cloth of gold, "The Rana of Cutch, the master of a myriad horse."

But though the Princess Suvona watched the gorgeous cavalcade of mail-clad knights upon stamping steeds, each armed with sword and lance and battle-axe, with tiger-claw daggers in his belt, and bright-hued plumes upon his helmet, it was less to her than a night's tamasha in the palace hall.

For six moons no tidings had come from the Prince of Delhi. Had he so chosen he could have come himself within half a moon, and taken the first pavilion.

Then Anandapal, the father of the bride, swore by the mighty Indur to humiliate the Prince Barath and spoil his pride. He set himself thinking to devise some scheme by which he would make the Prince of Delhi the laughing-stock of the assembled princes of the land of the Seven Rivers, and thereby deprive him for ever of their homage.

But do what he would, he could not force Prince Barath to attend in person the great durbar of the bridal. Thus he resolved to discover some method to make him attend by proxy. For, according to the sacred tradition, the bridal would be null and void if the chief claimant to the bride's hand was not represented at the durbar.

Then the dewan, the greatest minister of the State, whis-

pered a plan into the ear of Anandapal. And Anandapal, laughing right royally, praised it much and asked the dewan if he had devised it.

But the dewan confessed that it was told to him by the vakil of the palace. And the vakil of the palace confessed that he had heard it from the jemadar of the Court. And the jemadar of the Court confessed that he got it from the kotwal of the city, who, with much confusion, admitted that he had heard it from the bunniah at the bazaar, over a smoke of hookah. And likewise, the bunniah from the sonar, and the sonar from his new assistant—a strange man and a wonderful artisan in all manner of things.

Thus Anandapal sent for the sonar's new assistant and said to him, "Make us this effigy that it will be so like Barath that it will verily take his place at the durbar." For Anandapal meant that the effigy should be gross and hideous —unlike the Prince of Delhi—so that all might mock at it.

And the stranger answered, "Yea, I shall make it such that it will stand for the Prince of Delhi's very self, and fulfil the needs of the bridal according to the books." At which all there applauded, though none understood the hidden meaning of his words.

The stranger asked that a place be assigned him in the courtyard, adjoining the audience hall, and that it be fenced in with tall boards, so that none might disturb him or pry into his secrets. Within the enclosure he worked many a day, with sound of chisel and hammer and saw.

And all along the fields, beyond the courtyard, the men of Kanoj stood in little groups, speculating on his work, or making remarks on every fresh arrival at the pavilions. Then one day a drunken trooper came on a beautiful white charger and scattered them about, crying, "Hut! ye sons of pigs!"

They fell back on either side, and said to him mockingly, "Welcome, welcome, O mighty Prince!"

But those at the back of the throng cried bravely, "Salaam to thee, O Son of a groom of the Prince of Ajmere!"

And those before his horse's hoofs said knowingly, "Ohe, brothers, it is His Highness himself!"

" Or the low-born son of a drunken thief! "

Thus they called him chosen names, him and his fourteen ancestors. But the drunken trooper got drunker every day and, binding up a little more of his face, came nearer and nearer to the foot of the audience hall as he passed to the pavilions—till the multitude and the palace guards became quite used to the sight of his bandaged face and his magnificent white charger.

One dark night a veiled form came to the enclosure beside the audience hall, and called thrice with the kokil's cry, and at the soft note of the song-bird the artisan stole out silently, marvelling exceedingly.

" Thou art without comfort so long within. Take these, my mistress sends them to thee. Eat and drink." For she was dressed as a handmaid of the palace, and held in her hand a tray of delicate sweetmeats and a goblet of cool sherbet.

And giving her back the tray his eyes fell upon her hands and wrists—and he saw something there that made him start, something bright that scintillated sparks even in the faint starlight.

" Such hands as thine are a lady's hands, not a serving maid's," he murmured softly.

" Such speech as thine is a courtier's speech, not an artisan's." She lifted her veil over her head—and dropped it inadvertently from her face.

They looked at each other face to face, eye to eye, reading into each other's heart, then both laughed softly. They vaguely felt that a new compact was that moment sealed between them, for they were both on the same mission. He found his hand upon her hand, and clasping it in gentle embrace, drew her to him.

But gliding away swiftly, she said, " Be true to thy salt first—even as I must be to mine." For she sought her mistress' happiness even as he sought his master's.

" And then—after they have had their bliss? "

" We may seek our own."

He wavered a moment at that—then coming to her, whispered into her ear, " Upon the morrow watch, and at

the bridal act—swiftly, boldly, for the life of a prince and the heart of a princess will be in peril."

And upon the morrow, the day before the bridal, the artisan announced the completion of his task. At the hour of eve he threw open the front of the enclosure, and called for ten strong men and a stout hawser.

A while after there arose the sound of creaking wood, and the ten men emerged dragging out a car on wheels. The platform of the car, five cubits square, was scarce an arm's length off the ground; but what was upon it none could see. It seemed some sort of a structure four cubits high, but was hidden from view by a heavy cloth of jute that hung in folds all around it.

The ten men dragged the car into the porch, up to the foot of the hall.

"Let it be unveiled upon the morrow," the artisan said.

That night at the third watch, the artisan came to the palace guard, holding his face in his hands because of a toothache that had gripped him suddenly.

"I must strengthen the bolts and joints," he said, in much pain, "they might have been loosened by the dragging."

Thus the guard allowed him to pass and examine his work. But going out forthwith to fetch the tools he needed, the artisan came back with them in his hands—so that, unable to hold his face in his hands, he had bound it up instead with half his turban.

The guard, satisfied that all was well, paid no further heed to the matter. And the new sentry, at the beginning of the morning watch, knowing nothing of the matter, was not surprised that no stranger came to demand exit from the palace. At early dawn, seeing that a maiden of the palace had come to the adjoining garden to gather flowers for her mistress, he walked to the end of his beat and engaged in idle dalliance with the maiden. She held him there a while, glancing with a panting heart at something in the dim distance. Her heart was in her mouth as she saw the heavy cloth upon it quiver, shake, then lie still. That

instant she whisked off suddenly and vanished into the inner palace.

And now, upon the bridal morn the audience hall of the palace was a scene of splendour and magnificence. At its head upon a dais stood the musnud of Kanoj inlaid with deities, draped in costly brocade. Around the hall were already seated in a semicircle the hundred suitors of the Princess Suvona—the claimant of the highest rank nearest to the dais on the right hand, the next on the left, and all the rest in successive order to the end of the hall.

Alone at the foot of the hall, the lowest place in that brilliant assembly, stood that monstrous structure, in coarsest jute!

Suddenly the heavy curtains behind the dais were flung apart, and heralded by silver trumpets from the inner palace the great Prince of Kanoj stepped forth.

"Victory! Victory! To Anandapal, the favoured of the Gods!"

It was a shout, a roar—a spontaneous cry of joy and exultation, and, at the salutation of his guests, full of the happiest augury, he stood before his throne in the magnificence of pride. This was to be the hour of his triumph, the hour in which he would be acclaimed suzerain of a hundred princes and potentates.

He waved his hand, and at the signal two men stood beside the covered structure.

"Behold the Prince of Delhi!"

As the dark grey cloth fell off the structure, they gazed bewildered upon it. Of its purpose they had known nothing, but now a sudden light dawned upon them.

A cry of derision, a roar of laughter broke from their lips. Because of a woman's beauty they forgot the dignity of their princehood.

"Welcome, O brother!" they cried in mock salutation.

But ere the words of scorn had dried upon the lips of the suitors a vague uneasiness crept into their hearts. There seemed to be something in the aspect of the effigy that had escaped their notice before, something strange and uncanny

in its mien, some silent scorn in its face even beneath the coating of paint.

The sound of music came to their relief. From the long corridor at the back of the dais there came forth a hundred maidens, some robed in pink, some in mauve, some in palest blue—chanting a bridal song to the soft harmony of harps and mandolins and lyres. They filed past the throne and ranged themselves along the chamber in a curve, but she that came after them, the greatest of them all, paused and stood before the dais. Facing the throne, she slowly lifted her veil; then, head erect and face to face she sank upon the dais. It was the homage of the daughter to the father. Yea, and the challenge of the Princess to the oracle! For in that moment she realized that she had been made the unconscious tool of her father's ambition.

She stood up and faced her suitors—a dream of loveliness and gracefulness far transcending their highest fancy.

The venerable Poraheeth, the bridal priest, came forth from beside the throne, and stood by her side. "Daughter," he said to her, laying his aged hand upon her head, "according to the custom of thy forefathers thou must choose a husband from among these suitors here assembled—from them and no other—and whatsoever be thy choice, the sacred Shastras will ratify it. May the benign Lakme guide thee in thy choice. Pray to the Goddess."

The Lady Priamvada came to her other side, holding in one hand a garland of Chapak, and a scroll in the other. From the scroll, written in full by the order of Anandapal, she proclaimed the name, the rank, the possessions of each suitor, from the highest to the lowest. "The Prince of Delhi, a recreant suitor. For him, here stands in a beggar's garb a lifeless statue of common wood."

Taking the bridal garland from her, the Poraheeth placed it in the hand of the bride. "He upon whom thou wilt place this garland is thy destined spouse. Now choose, in the name of Lakme."

Suddenly her lips pursed tight, a strange wild gleam shone in her eyes. For one brief moment she paused, looked in silent scorn over the heads of that splendid multitude,

then passed swiftly on—past the princes, past the chieftains, past the nobles—till she stood before that hideous statue.

"My love—my wedded spouse!"

She that scorned the hand of living man flung the garland around the neck of that lifeless effigy, and clung to it in the abandonment of her love.

The air hung thick with impending storm. Like a sullen sea gathering strength a deep murmur passed from mouth to mouth, arose, wavered, sank, rose again—then burst into a raging torrent.

"An insult! To us and our claims!—

"I challenge—this choice!"

The Prince of the Nilghiros, a stalwart giant, sprang to his feet with his hand on sword.

"And I take up thy challenge!" Swift as a meteor flash a horseman shot to the foot of the audience hall from beyond the porch—clad in full panoply of war, with sword and lance and battle-axe.

But shouts of derision greeted him. For the palace courtiers standing along the hall had recognized him.

"Thou, a common artisan!"

For, indeed, his face was the face of the sonar that had made the effigy—his horse the magnificent white charger upon which the unknown trooper had passed and repassed.

"No! A Rajput knight equal in caste to all ye here—save one."

He bent his head a moment toward the wooden effigy, kissing the hilt of his sword, then, springing forward, he placed his horse between it and the body of the hall.

"Come, O Prince, and claim my blood for the insult placed upon thee!"

Stung by the taunt, the stalwart giant beside the throne flung himself through the hall.

"Stay! Let no man move! By the curse of the Shastras, let no man move. Prince, put back thy sword!" It was the deep voice of the Poraheeth that checked them all. "The bride has chosen that lifeless effigy for her destined spouse, in preference to thee, O Prince."

Then a shriek of terror rang through the hall. With

blanched faces and eyes starting out of their sockets they gazed before them.

For the wooden statue came to life before them. Its breast heaved with some pent-up emotions, and a human sigh came from its lips. It stretched forth its arms like a blind man—then bending down its head, caught up the drooping maiden to its embrace, claiming her for its bride.

"A miracle! A miracle!" It was a low, deep murmur of sudden fear and panic.

"The work of the devil rather." They caught at the slender hope like a drowning man clutching at a straw.

"The devil in the body of that sonar."

Chand Singh, the Rajput knight, leaped down from his horse at that cry.

"But this is a human sword, great sirs, come and test it!" He cast a glance behind him to see that his faithful steed stood beside the car—"Come, Mahashoi! Why dost thou not come? Art afraid?"

But ere the challenged suitor could cross the dais, a clarion voice rang through the hall—no man knew from where.

"Enough, my brother! I am thy proof!"

A shadow darkened on the porch. A fine-tusked elephant, the lord of the battle line, filled the narrow gateway, then, seeing the white charger beside the car, it entered the arena within and stood on the other side.

Then again that self-same voice thrilled through their hearts.

"By her own choice and the sacred Shastras, the Princess is my bride!"

Amid the hushed silence a trembling hand pointed to the effigy. "Hark! The voice comes from that!"

Before their horror-stricken gaze something fell from the face of the effigy with a sound of splintering glass—and its eyes lost their vacant stare, and became human.

And whilst yet the multitude gazed, the thin coating of carved wood masking the face parted along the line of the nose and down each ear, and fell to the ground.

The face that appeared was bound up in cloth along the chin.

"The drunken trooper!"

But, raising his right, he snatched the cloth off his face. He shook his limbs—and the beggar's garb fell off his body. The wooden casing over the limbs hinged out at the knees and tilted down upon the floor with a cold, hard fall.

Thus the lifeless effigy which the Princess had chosen for her spouse bent its knee to her father.

But the living man that had stood within it stood before them all in full splendour of his regalia.

"Prince Barath!"

"The master of ye all!" Saying this, he sprang upon the horse with his bride. She entwined her arms around him, and pillowed her head upon his breast.

"Come to the wedding feast, my vassals!" he cried over his shoulder, and vanished through the porch.

But the faithful Chand, mindful of his trust, cried after him, "The camel waits beyond. Her upon it, thyself on the horse!"

He sprang to the elephant, and the obedient beast stretched forth its trunk and lifted him up to the steel-clad howdah—then, backing to the porch, it stood stately and still, blocking the narrow passageway.

Then the impending storm burst out in fury. Held in the stupor of surprise by the suddenness and quickness of events, the spectators now loosened their limbs and tongues.

A hundred swords flashed in the air. A hundred furious men swept aside the maidens that stood in their path, and sprang to the porch.

But the great elephant waved its trunk and tilted up its tusks.

"Gr-r-r-rump!" it said, flapping its huge ears and blinking its little red eyes ominously—and the hundred men fell back.

"Come, my love, let us to our bridal!" the warrior upon the howdah called to one before him. "Fear not: the beast will lift thee up! Quick!"

A faint cry—the flash of loose drapery—and Priamvada broke from the throng and reached the portico.

But from beside the pillar of the archway a vengeful hand shot out, fell upon her, caught her, and thrust her back.

With a bleeding heart the faithful Chand turned to go to cover the retreat of his Prince. The huge beast slowly backed away from the gateway, swung around, then broke into long strides through the courtyard, over the fields—beyond the ridge on the distant horizon.

" Continue the rest upon the next night," he bade the Story-teller.

" But tell me first, O Man of Wisdom, how came the Prince Barath to be within the wooden effigy? "

The Story-teller bowed his head to the fringe of the golden quilt. " In the previous night, in the third watch, when the artisan came to examine his work and went out to fetch the tools—it was not he that returned with his face bound up in half of his turban: it was the Prince Barath himself. Then, in the morning watch, when the new sentry had been allured away toward the garden, he placed himself upon the car. For the effigy was hollow, made of many thin strips.

The Jungle-Killed may Live

From Ajmare Sharief, as we journey to the northern provinces of India again, the Indian officer developed almost a passionate regard to see the wondrous Taj Mahal.

A youth walked beside an old man. His senior was telling him how to care for the paths in between those lordly sycamore trees that skirt the marble fountains facing the Taj.

In the gloaming, as the two gardeners walked in and out of those unforgettable Taj gardens, the scene bespoke of a different epoch.

" Salaam, Hazoor," said the old man, as we, finishing our evening prayer, approached the Taj. " I am just taking my son round to give him my final instructions before I retire from my work as a gardener here," he said. He thought Qamar Ali had an officer's look, pilgrim's garb though he wore.

This little courtesy so pleased my companion that the Malli, the ancient keeper of Taj Gardens, took employment with us.

He had been a servant in Bengal: a good servant he must have been, for he loved his master, Kumar Ghosh, and he often related the fine Shikar story, which his master so expressively put in the language of the old gamekeeper.

This is how it ran:

I was a Shikari from the first down that appeared upon my lip. I was called brave; but it was the ordinary bravery of youth, of those who have not tasted the bitter fruit of danger. The Sahibs were very fond of hunting in those days—it was in the time of Bahadur. They used to spend whole days together in the jungle, and never came back until they had got their quarry. I was often employed by them to track the tiger, the leopard, and the wild bear. I wandered through the land day and night, stopping now and then at some village where they had lost a buffalo and trailing the animal who had killed it to its lair. Many a night I have spent in the jungle itself with no better bed

than the branch of a tree and no food but a few wild dates. I learned to know the jungle beasts as I knew my own people. It was a pleasant, care-free life for a young man.

One day found me in search of a tiger which I had promised to mark down for my Sahib, in whose employ I had been for five years. He had once, when he was going home to England, presented me with a good rifle and ammunition, which I carried with me. But I did not have to kill the beasts myself—the Sahibs attended to that; I carried the gun only to defend myself in case of need. As I was walking through the country toward a stretch of jungle where I had hoped my search would be rewarded, I came upon a herd of buffaloes and their keeper. There were thirty buffaloes—twenty-six cows and four bulls. I knew the keeper slightly and spoke to him. After mentioning several indifferent matters, he said: "Something strange happened this morning. The wind was blowing from the jungle. Just when we got to yonder ford, the cow buffaloes showed signs of panic, and the bulls lowered their heads and tossed their horns as if to charge. But I examined the whole country without discovering anything unusual. When the wind fell the herd resumed its grazing as before."

Telling the man that if it happened again he had better take to a tree, I left him, and walked on toward the jungle, which was no great distance off. On my right was the little stream that the herd of buffaloes had crossed. The path I was following ran close to its bank. I kept my eyes open, conjecturing that if a tiger was at hand he probably came to this stream to drink; but as close inspection of the banks revealed no tracks, I decided that the buffaloes must have given a false alarm.

Having assured myself on this point, as I supposed, I seated myself by the stream and, taking some chupatties from my haversack, began to eat. When I leaned over the water to take a drink, I fancied I heard a distant growl. I raised my head and listened intently, but the sound seemed to cease. Thinking that I must have been deceived, I bent over again to drink, but just when my lips touched the water I again heard a low snarling sound, more distinctly than

ever. To make sure, I turned my head and placed my ear close to the stream itself. In a moment or two a low, muttering growl was repeated close enough to convince me that I was not mistaken. I immediately rose, cocked my gun, and faced the direction from which the sound came. By this time there was no mistaking it, for it was drawing nearer and rising to a roar of rage. Only a minute or two elapsed before a black mass, enveloped in a cloud of dust, burst through a thicket not many feet away and charged across the stream. I recognized at once the herd of buffaloes I had seen that morning. They quickly vanished, tails in the air, but not before I had had time to count them. They were twenty-nine—one now was missing; and the herdsman was missing too.

What was a tragedy for them was perhaps an opportunity for me. With a fresh kill and water near by, the tiger would not leave the place for a week; I should have plenty of time to notify my Sahib. But another question also occupied my mind—if I went back as I had come, by the path close to the jungle, the animal might spring upon me. As a precaution I climbed a tall tree to explore the terrain, assuming that, as soon as he had fed, the tiger would come to the stream to drink. I remained in the tree for a full two hours, keeping my eyes fixed on the water below, without perceiving anything unusual. At length I saw a great flock of crows approaching in the distance. They circled around without alighting for a considerable time—in fact, it must have been nearly an hour before they finally settled behind the trees, a few hundred yards from my lookout.

Thinking that if it was safe for the crows to descend I might do so likewise, I slid down to the foot of the tree and cautiously advanced in the direction of the crows. Fortunately the intervening country was fairly clear of weeds and underbrush, but I detoured carefully to avoid any clump of trees or bushes where an animal might hide. The hoarse cawing of the feeding crows guided my steps. Before long I could hear the flapping of their wings mingling with their noisy chatter, and hastening forward caught a glimpse through an opening of a grassy meadow beyond which lay

park-like grazing country. In the middle of the meadow was an almost solid mass of the sable birds I had been watching, flapping and struggling and pulling at some object in their midst. Others, already surfeited with their feast, were perched on the neighbouring trees. Even as I watched them they suddenly ceased feeding, at some signal of alarm, and with a great swishing of wings rose from the half-stripped bones of a buffalo. Just then——

I have never been able to recall what happened next. I have a hazy recollection of a terrible angry roar almost in my ears, of a flash of yellow through the air, and of feeling my head come in violent contact with the ground. Then I lost consciousness.

When I came to it was like waking up in the midst of a nightmare. I felt an acute pain in my thigh, and my head seemed to be spinning along the ground. Accompanying this was a sensation of falling from a great height. Little by little, as I collected my faculties, I realized my true situation. I was staring at the ground, which was slipping under me, not two inches from my nose, at great speed. Bending my head slightly, I caught a glimpse of the yellow stripes of the huge animal that was carrying me, head and tail erect, as easily as a cat carries a mouse. My feet and hands were lacerated by passing thorns and bushes. A sense of utter helplessness overwhelmed me.

Yes, brothers, a brave man may be paralyzed by fright. Possibly that was my condition. If I had made the slightest sound or voluntary movement, the tiger, who thought me dead, would have made himself doubly sure of it on the spot. How long I retained consciousness I don't know. I vaguely recalled afterward an impression of having been tossed on the ground like a sack of grain, but I must have swooned a second time at that very moment.

When I emerged again into the world of human experience I was racked with pain in every limb and muscle. My head ached as if it would split. A low, rhythmic noise was ringing in my ears. I still shudder when I recall that moment. Gradually I grasped the true situation. The tiger had set his teeth so deep into my thigh that they still seemed to grip it.

Little by little I convinced myself, however, that I was lying on the ground amid little piles of sand. Next I discovered that the sound which had been ringing in my ears came from a short distance away. It was the low snoring of a sleeping beast. I did not dare to move, for I knew that a sleeping tiger would be startled to his feet by even the falling of a leaf. So intent was my pain that I feared I might again lose consciousness. Rallying all my will power, I began to reason. Why had not the tiger killed me? Some time must have passed—perhaps several hours—since he had sprung upon me. I concluded after a moment's thought that he had already eaten his fill from the buffalo. He had been on the way to the stream, to drink, when I, reassured by the settling of the crows upon the carcass, had descended from the tree. On his return to his kill he had discovered me. Then, thinking me dead, and being in a state of repletion, he had merely carried me here, prepared to devour me after sunset.

As soon as my mind began to work normally I felt my strength return. I listened intently. The snoring continued —a light rhythmic murmur like a breeze blowing through dead foliage. I did not dare to rise, but, timing myself by the crescendos of the beast's heavy breathing, I very slowly turned over on my left side so that I could look in the direction of the animal. It took but a glance—he lay stretched out within a yard of me, his head cushioned upon his forepaws. I shut my eyes and thought. Were I to spring up suddenly—supposing I were not partly crippled by my lacerated thigh—the beast would be upon me in an instant. As I lay there with my eyes half-closed, thinking intently, my attention was attracted to a swaying shadow just beyond the sleeping tiger and five or six feet above the level of the ground. I followed its motion uncomprehendingly for an instant; then my curiosity was aroused. Surely it had not been there a moment before. What could it be?

Slowly, infinitely slowly and cautiously, I turned my head until I could get a more distinct view. Then I had difficulty in suppressing an exclamation. There, braced on the lower branch of a tree, twelve or fifteen feet above the

ground, stood a man holding his unwound turban, one end of which was tied to the branch at his feet. He stood there supporting himself with one hand from a higher limb. I recognized the buffalo herder.

Neither of us made a motion. Should I attempt to reach the swaying cloth with a sudden spring? Not yet. I could not make it quickly enough from my present position. Understand, brothers, that I was lying on my left side, with my arms above my head and my legs still twisted to the right. One step away lay the sleeping tiger, almost at my feet. Three paces from my head was the swaying cloth. If I sprang up from that position, I should never reach it. Gritting my teeth so that my very breathing might be inaudible, I gradually drew over my legs, stopping every instant for fear some little rustle might arouse the tiger. Even as it was, once or twice the animal turned restlessly in his sleep. Slowly, silently, by infinitesimal movements, I drew my left arm back to my side. Little by little I raised my head. I knew I must make the distance in one short second. A single footfall, no matter how light, would bring the beast instantly to his feet. Yet it was three full paces between me and problematical salvation. The tree was a large one. There was only one chance—that the bewildered animal might not at first glance discover my exact position. At length, with a single spring, I landed beneath the tree, and instantly grasped the suspended cloth which swung toward me.

"Look out, brother," shouted the herder, trying to pull me up—for at my first movement the tiger had leaped to his feet with a growl of fury. He looked around to see where I fled—the moment that saved me. It took him but the fraction of an instant, however, to discover me swinging from the cloth. I had to climb up, hand over hand, six, seven, eight, nine feet.

"Pull up your legs, brother," shouted the herdsman; "the tiger's going to spring." The beast did so just as I obeyed the injunction. I hung there contracted into the smallest possible compass, when, with a low roar of rage, he bounded upward. I saw the flash of his huge body just

below me, and was conscious of a pang of acute pain in my right leg from the ankle to the knee. Simultaneously with the thud of the tiger as he struck the ground, I made a last desperate effort to ascend, and felt a firm hand grasp my wrist and pull me up to temporary safety.

None too early. As I swung over the limb I felt the hot breath of the leaping animal on my feet. He had got his distance, and would have seized me in his jaws had I still been swinging where I was a moment before. "Hold me," I gasped, about to faint.

That was all I could say. I felt myself swaying. A cloud of mist came before my eyes. I was bleeding profusely from the deep laceration of the tiger's claws. The herdsman bound my leg as well as he could with the turban cloth, and tied me securely to the branch on which I was seated.

And the tiger—what did he do? What a wild beast beside himself with fury would do. He sprang at us time after time, tore up the earth with his claws, licked greedily the blood beneath the tree, and stared up at us with flaming eyes.

"Courage, brother," the herdsman repeated to me, to keep me from losing consciousness. "Help is coming. It can't be long now."

"How? Where from?" I murmured. "Who knows we are in danger?"

"The buffaloes. They must have got back to the village long ago. The whole place has received the alarm. They'll be here before long."

It seemed a slender hope. I knew the village was fully seven miles away. Still, it was not yet noon.

So we waited. The tiger also. An hour passed. Little by little the shadows grew longer and longer. An hour or two more and it would be dark; then, hunger and death. Suddenly the herdsman grasped my arm.

"Do you hear, brother?" he said, turning his ear toward the wind. I listened. A breeze was rippling in the trees. The tiger yawned and growled restlessly below. At length I also caught a sound like the echo of distant thunder. I raised my eyes to look at the sky. Not a cloud was in sight.

"Not up there, not up there; it's coming from over yonder"—and the herdsman nodded in the direction of the village.

I stared toward the point he indicated, but nothing was visible. Yet the sound was now perceptibly louder. Ten minutes, twenty minutes, passed. Then we gave a shout of joy; we knew help was coming, for we could distinguish in the rising evening breeze the horrible clash of tom-toms and savage cries, which was sweeter to our ears than the most beautiful music.

Brothers, that is all. There are one hundred or more of them, armed with clubs and spears, stout fellows every one. They had often served as game-beaters to the Sahibs. Besides, they had other help—the herd of buffaloes driven before them, tossing their three-foot horns. Have you ever seen a herd of buffaloes thoroughly enraged? No? Well, a tiger never waits for them; and this one was no exception. He sniffed the air, listened to the roar of the oncoming buffaloes and finally, lowering his head and dragging his tail like a whipped dog, slunk off between the thickets.

"Yes, friends," concluded the old shikari, looking round at the silent circle, "I have had many companions in my adventures, but I am the only man I ever heard of who lived to tell the tale after being seized and carried off by a man-eater."

The Serpent God Decides

Roaming awhile in the shrines of India, we met and saw nothing very much more remarkable, for India does not change. Except in the Holy City of Benares. There were the same bazaar moneylenders, the Pan-sellers, the cool drink sellers, the same sort of unfortunate undergraduate, who, having failed in his B.A., was now a political worker; and the same sort of procession of peasant women as Aurunzab might have seen wending their way home after a village fair; and, best of all sights, perhaps, was the hurrying figures of the members of local municipality on their way to lunch after a whole forenoon's loud and long talk in the House. On the bank of the sacred Ganges, one saw the Sadhus, besmeared with ashes, being fed by the fat and oily Bunia, whilst the holy man wrote a charm for the Bunia's wife. To some these might be the side-shows in Indian life, but to others they are the real aspects of the mind of unchanging Hindustan.

The sight of a Sadhu attracted me greatly. Unlike others, he sat apart, his body bare, his legs crossed, his eyes closed in meditation, and before him the concourse of humanity washing themselves, tinkling bells, putting paint upon the idols or carrying trayfuls of fruit and flowers to the temple.

It was at night when the throng was lessened and the bathers in the Holy Ganges were fewest, that his followers gathered around him to hear his nightly stories based, as they were, on some ancient theme. Qamar Ali and I, though not of the Hindu faith, were permitted to listen to it.

The Guro, having performed the sacred rite of tinkling the bell before the stone god Ganish, rose and besmeared himself with the holy almond oil. His three days of fasting, during which he neither touched bread nor milk, were now ended. But as for days he had not spoken to a living soul, now he recited the magic Mantaras. At first he muttered in slow and deliberate tone. Soon the cadence rose higher and higher, till his voice sang even above the noise of the rustling leaves of the pepal tree in the temple courtyard.

The chant was now taken up by a youth. Sitting as he was under the giant pepal tree, the Guro's sacred words meant more than pious intonations to the younger man. He, too, now rose and tinkled the bell before Ganish, the Wisdom god of the Holy Ganges.

"My son!" spoke the Guro, "the hour draws nigh, the portents are true to our designs . . . Go."

The youth bowed his head in obedience to the priest's command; but he did not leave the temple till he had washed the caste marks from his forehead and donned a peasant's garb. Soon he was in the bazaar, singing loudly and reciting the verses of ancient literature. Then he played a tune on his rustic lute.

The melon-sellers had now heaped their fruit at the market-place, the village women were spreading their *kambuls* on the dusty roadside, exhibiting for sale their home-grown cucumbers, Bhindi and Karaila vegetables; the potter was hurrying his donkeys to the booth; the weekly fair and market was in full swing, for the sun had risen two lances above the horizon.

In and out of the throng of buyers and sellers the rustic youth played his lute, and passed from booth to booth, till he, reciting the hoary lay, stopped suddenly, as if possessed. Then he spoke:—

> "The Great Bell of the Temple shall tinkle, the stone figure of cold marble shall walk when the House of the Raja is to go into the possession of the rightful owners."

Men and women, their mouths agape with astonishment nodded their heads, for this traditional prophecy was well known through the length and breadth of Raja Sundar. And none loved Sundar. No, none loved him, even the women whom he courted.

But the youth ought to have added that that tinkling of the Great Bell of the Temple would be heard by no one but those in the inner palace. It should act as a warning to him. He might have said, too, that the very end will be when five tears drop from the eyes of the god Ganish in the sanctuary of the Guro.

To the people assembled there, however, he said nothing of this: though they knew of the tradition already.

Anon the Raja Sundar's men set upon the youth.

"Why dost thou speak treason?" thundered one of the palace guards as he whipped the youth and dragged him before Sundar.

Now, the Raja Sundar was awrath like the keeper of Hell. In purple rage he ordered the youth to be placed under the Bell.

"That Bell I have had removed from the Temple merely to kill that ugly superstition of such rustics as this, so that . . ."

"And it took three hundred bullocks to cart it and suspend it in the palace, too," chipped a courtier.

"Dry thy throat," roared the Raja, "I alone shall speak!"

"It is a living thing! It is living!" shouted a guard, as, running from the inner chamber of the hall, he threw himself on the feet of the Maharaja.

"What is living? What is . . . ? You mad dog . . . Speak," cried Sundar, as the terrified guard's report seemed to introduce a new element into the situation.

"The marble statue is walking, the Bell has tinkled. Oh! Oh! Maharaj, my master, it is living—the stone come to life!" wailed the servant.

Sundar, taking no more notice of the hue and cry raised by the terror-stricken man, ordered the peasant youth to be imprisoned under the Bell, whilst he thought of Chandi, the Princess, cast in the mould of Paradise as she was. So enamoured was he of her beauty.

"Parmatma!" cried Chandi, waking from her delusion, "What do I hear? You, my noble father-in-law! You, the mighty Raja, the father of Shankar, your so recently deceased heir, and the loving husband of the Rani, who has shown aught but kindness to me!"

"I tell you," burst forth Sundar the Raja, "I, aye I and no other seek thy hand! The Rani of whom you speak is no longer my wife; I divorce her from this hour. I must have thee, for mine fate depends upon having sons."

220 He seized the cold, trembling hands of Chandi; her sari fell from the lock of her hair; she tore her jewelled tiara in fright and horror at her father-in-law's suggestion. She shrieked, and then in agony stared at him; then again gathering courage, she ran to the door.

The Raja was at her heels. This lovely woman he will have as his mate, for he must have sons to carry his name to far countries of Hindustan: for an heirless house perishes, and Sundar wished to have his glory known till the Mahatmas descended down the plains from the heights of the lordly Himalayas.

Even as his hand clutched the sari of the fleeing Chandi, the Giant Ancestral Temple Bell tinkled. A faint tinkle it was. Just two short strokes muffled to the rest of the world —for thus it was ordained—but audible only to the Raja.

The Princess, who gathered courage from her situation upon hearing the Bell—she, too, had known the secret of the tinkle—cried: "Look, look, Maharaj! The Sacred Bell itself declares against your intentions."

"Heaven nor hell shall impede my will!" shouted Sundar: for Sundar so far considered the Bell tradition as a foolish legend, the outcome of women's day-dreaming. And women have their brains upside down in such matters, according to more than one of the advisers of Sundar.

Maddened with the intensity of his vile designs, the Raja dragged Chandi down, her sari in hand. He was now holding a dagger to her chest, for thus he will have her consent to marriage.

A curious sound tarried his hands. They both looked up to the niche where stood the marble statue of the Maharaja's great ancestor

"See, Maharaj, see!" the Princess gasped. The stone statue had come to life.

The forbear of Sundar walked in that cold marble structure of his.

"Do my eyes see aright?" Sundar rubbed his eyes. The statue—now alive—beckoned the Raja to follow him.

Amazed and bewildered, Sundar followed. Step by step

he walked behind the thing which no mortal imagination could conceive.

Step by step, the statue descended the marble staircase of the palace. Through the Hall of Audience he led Sundar, through the Corridors of Courtiers the Raja walked behind his ancestor, as if spellbound he followed the stone come to life, on and onward to the outer chambers, and still they went on slowly, ever so slowly, Sundar mortified with fear.

The same enchantment was not upon the Princess Chandi; and, regaining her balance, she ran up and then down and down, towards the vaulted passages. Fortunate, too, it was that the Raja had ordered everyone out whilst he conversed with Chandi alone. Not a soul was allowed within the precincts of the marble castle at that hour to impede Chandi's escape.

At the outer side of the Chamber where the Raja used to hold his Durbar, the statue led the way; slowly he opened the barred door. Both stepped in. The place, like the entire castle, was empty.

Then the statue motioned his descendant to the gold throne in the centre of the Hall, while he stood for a fraction of a second. The Raja, as bidden, walked to the throne; he ascended the dais, but, as he turned to sit on the throne, the vision had vanished. It had gone as if nothing had happened.

Sundar once again rubbed his eyes. The Throne Room of his Durbar was empty as before. Everything was there as usual. The door ajar, but the statue had gone. Was it there at all . . . Baghwan and his gods only can tell.

He ran up to the landing to see whither his grandsire had vanished. No, the statue was there, there in its niche. He touched it. The cold marble numbed his fingers; the stone was stone once again.

How long it took for the vision to take Sundar away from his original place where he courted Chandi cannot be measured. Suffice it here to add that Chandi was by now in the outmost part of the dark and secret passage that led captives to their death in the waves of the sea that lapped the walls of Sundar's castle.

And whilst Sundar foamed and raged at the foot of the statue for the play of fancy which had taken him away from his prey, Chandi struggled for freedom.

An awful silence reigned throughout these subterranean passages, except for an occasional gust of wind that violently moved the doors which she had passed. In their ghost-like antiquity the doors grated on their rusty hinges, echoing and re-echoing through the labyrinth of airy castle passages.

Sundar was not the man to be turned away from his purpose easily. A mighty trumpet he blew, summoning his retainers, and a search for Chandi was ordered.

"See you all the nooks and corners of the castle!" ordered Sundar, "And the one who speaks of this search to anyone outside the castle shall have his tongue slit and dragged through a hole in his neck."

Not even to the Rani, his wife, was it to be reported. The search was to be immediate, thorough, and all operations to be carried out in secrecy. Sword in hand, the Raja led the search party.

But every murmur that struck Chandi in the dark passage filled her with terror. There might be cobras in this dreadful passage; there certainly was the raging sea at the end of the tunnel, and, what was surer, was the booming voice of Sundar urging his men to pursue her. She trod as softly as fear would give her leave.

In one of those dreadful moments she thought she heard someone breathe. She shuddered and recoiled a few paces. In a moment she thought she heard the step of someone. Her blood curdled! She thought it was Sundar. Every suggestion that horror could inspire rushed into her mind. Did she condemn her flight, which had thus exposed her to the Raja's rage in a place where her cries were not likely to draw anybody to her assistance?

Yet the sound seemed not to come from behind. If the Raja knew where she was he must have followed her. She was still in one of the cloisters, and the steps she heard were too distinct to proceed from the way she had come. Hoping in despair to find a friend in whoever was not Sundar, she was going to advance, when a door at some distance to the

left was gently opened. But ere her lamp which she held up could discover who opened it, the person retreated precipitately on seeing the light.

Chandi, whom every incident was sufficient to freeze in fear, hesitated whether she should pass. Her dread of Sundar soon outweighed every other terror. The very circumstance of the person avoiding her gave her a sort of courage. It could not be, she thought, a servant of the castle, for her kind treatment of them had never raised her an enemy, and conscious innocence made her hope that, unless sent by the Raja's order to seek her, his servants would rather assist than prevent her flight.

Consoled with these thoughts, she approached the door that had been opened; but a sudden gust of wind that met her at the door extinguished her lamp and left her in total darkness. Words cannot paint the horror of Chandi's situation. Alone in so dismal a place, her mind imprinted with all the terrible events of the day, hopeless of escaping, expecting every moment the arrival of Sundar, and far from tranquil in knowing she was within reach of somebody, she knew not whom, who for some cause seemed concealed thereabouts—all these thoughts were now crowding on her distracted mind. To Indra, to Ganish and to Rama, the great gods of the Hindus, she prayed for help; and stood there for a while in an agony of despair. At last, as softly as it was possible, she felt for the door, and, having found it, entered trembling into the vault from whence she had heard the steps. It gave her a kind of momentary joy to see a ray of clouded moonshine gleam from the roof of the vault, which seemed to be fallen in, and from whence hung a fragment of some sort of building—she could not distinguish what it was—that appeared to have been crushed inwards. Eagerly she moved towards this chasm, when she discerned a human form standing close against the wall. She shrieked, believing it to be the ghost of some captive of the Raja. The figure, advancing, said in a submissive voice:

"Be not alarmed, lady, I will not hurt you."

Chandi, a little encouraged by the tone of voice of the stranger, and recollecting that this must be the person who

had opened the door, recovered her spirits enough to reply: "Maharaj, whoever you are, take pity on a wretched princess, standing on the brink of destruction. Assist me to escape from this danger-ridden castle, or in a few moments I may be made miserable for life."

"Alas!" said the stranger, "what can I do to assist you? I will die in your defence, but I am unacquainted with the castle, and want liberty myself."

"Oh!" said Chandi, hastily interrupting him, "help me but to find a trap-door that must be hereabouts, and it is the greatest service you can do me, for I have not a moment to lose."

Having said these words, she felt about the pavement and directed the stranger to search likewise for a smooth piece of brass, enclosed in one of the stones.

"That," said she, "is the lock which opens with a spring, of which I know the secret. If we can find it, I may escape . . . if not, alas, courteous stranger, I fear I shall have involved you in my misfortunes. Sundar will suspect you for the accomplice of my flight, and you will fall a victim to his wrath, which means death."

"I value not my life," said the stranger, "and it will be some comfort to lose it in trying to deliver a woman from his tyranny."

"Gallant Brahman, for you must be born of the Clan of the Moon," said Chandi, "how shall I ever repay?"

As they spoke thus, a ray of moonshine streamed through a cranny of the ruin above and shone directly on the lock they sought.

"Oh Brahma be praised!" said Chandi, "Here is the trap-door," and taking out the key she touched the spring, which, starting aside, discovered an iron ring. "Lift up the door," said the Princess.

The stranger obeyed, and beneath appeared some stone steps descending into a vault of total darkness.

"We must go down here," said Chandi; "follow me. Dark and dismal as it is we cannot miss our way; it leads directly to the Guro's Temple . . . but perhaps," added the Princess modestly, "you have no reason to leave the

castle, nor have I further occasion for your service; in a few minutes I shall be safe from Sundar's rage—only let me know to whom I am so much obliged."

"I will never quit you," said the stranger, eagerly, "until I have placed you in safety. Nor think me, Princess, more generous than I am."

His words were interrupted by a sudden burst of voices, and they heard:

"Talk not to me of necromancers; I tell you she must be in the castle. I will find her in spite of enchantment."

"Oh Mahatmas!" cried Chandi, "it is the voice of Sundar. Make haste or we are as dead stones; and shut the trap-door after you."

Hurriedly she descended the steps and, as the stranger hastened to follow her, the door slipped out of his hands; it fell and the spring closed over it.

He tried in vain to open it, not having discovered Chandi's method of touching the spring; nor had he any time to struggle with it; the door was between him and the Princess.

Sundar had heard the noise of the falling door, and in less time than it takes to relate, he hurried to where the youth stood; the blazing torches of his servants cast a glow of red death upon his face.

"It must be Chandi," yelled Sundar, before he entered the vault; "she is escaping by the subterranean passage, but she cannot have got far."

What was the astonishment of the Raja, when, instead of Chandi, the light of the torches discovered to him the young peasant whom he thought confined under the Giant Temple Bell.

"Traitor!" cried Sundar. "How can you be here? I thought you in imprisonment above in the court."

"I am no traitor," replied the young man boldly, "nor am I answerable for your thoughts."

"Presumptuous villain!" said Sundar. "Do you dare to provoke my wrath? Tell me, how have you escaped from above? You have corrupted my guards and their lives shall answer for it."

"My poverty," said he calmly, "will free them from any

such blame; though the ministers of a tyrant's wrath, to you they are faithful, and but too willing to execute the orders which you unjustly impose upon them."

"Are you so foolhardy as to dare my vengeance?" roared the Raja. "But tortures will soon force the truth from you. Tell me, I will know your accomplices."

"There was my accomplice," said the youth smiling, and pointing to the roof. Sundar ordered torches to be held up, and saw that one of the sides of the Giant Temple had sunk in the floor, had cracked the earth, and through a hole he had escaped into the vault where Princess Chandi found him.

"Was that the way by which you descended?" said Sundar.

"It was," said the youth.

"But what noise was that," said Sundar, "which I heard as I entered the cloister?"

"A door closed," said the peasant; "I heard it as well as you."

"What door?" said Sundar hastily.

"I am not acquainted with your castle," said the peasant. "This is the first time I have entered it, and this vault the only part within which I ever was."

"But I tell thee," said Sundar (wishing to find out whether the youth had discovered the trap-door), "it was this way I heard the noise. My servants heard it, too."

"Maharaj," interrupted one of them officiously, "to be sure it was the trap-door, and he was going to make his escape."

"Peace, blockhead!" said the Raja angrily. "If he was going to escape, how should he come on this side? I will know from his own mouth what noise it was I heard. Tell me truly; your life depends on it."

"My veracity is dearer to me than my life," said the peasant. "By the blessings of the Mahatmas I shall always tell the truth: and my life is safe till the gods of the mighty Himalayas order its return."

"Indeed, young philosopher," said Sundar contemptuously; "tell me then what was the noise I heard?"

"Ask me what I can answer," said he, "and put me to death instantly if I tell a lie."

Sundar, growing impatient at the steady valour and indifference of the youth, burst in rage: "What then, you man of truth! Answer. Was it the fall of the trap-door I heard?"

"It was," said the youth.

"It was!" cried the Raja. "And how did you come to know where the trap-door was?"

"I saw the plate of brass by a gleam of moonshine," replied the peasant.

"But what told you it was a lock?" said Sundar. "How did you discover the secret of opening it?"

"Mahatma that delivered me from the Bell suffocation was able to direct me to the spring of a lock," was the reply.

"Mahatmas should have gone a little further, and placed you out of the reach of my resentment," growled Sundar. "When Mahatmas had taught you to open the lock, they abandoned you for a fool, who did not know how to make use of their favours. Why did you not pursue the path pointed out for your escape? Why did you shut the trap-door before you had descended the steps?"

"I might ask you, Maharaj," said the peasant, "how I, totally unacquainted with your castle, was to know that those steps led to any outlet? Wherever those steps lead to, perhaps I should have explored the way—I could not be in a worse situation than I was. But the truth is, I let the trap-door fall; your immediate arrival followed. I had given the alarm . . . what matters it to me whether I was seized a moment sooner or a moment later?"

"You are a resolute villain for your years," said Sundar, "yet on reflection I suspect you trifle with me. You have not yet told me how you opened the lock."

"That I will show you, my lord," said the peasant, and taking up a fragment of stone that had fallen from above, he laid himself on the trap-door and began to beat a piece of brass that covered it, meaning to gain time for the escape of the Princess.

This presence of mind, joined to the frankness of the

youth, staggered Sundar. He even felt a disposition towards pardoning one who had been guilty of no crime.

While the Raja was in this suspense, a confused noise of voices echoed through the distant vaults. As the sound approached, he distinguished the clamours of some of his servants whom he had dispersed through the castle in search of Chandi. They called out:

"Where is my Maharaj? Where is the Raja, the descendant of the Moon?"

"Here I am," cried Sundar, as they came nearer. "Have you found the Princess Chandi?"

The first that arrived replied: "Oh, Bhagwan Maharaj! I am glad we have found you . . ."

"Found me!" said Sundar. "Have you found the Princess?"

"We thought we had, my lord," said the fellow, looking terrified, "but . . ."

"But what?" cried the Raja, "has she escaped?"

"Sumbha, my lord . . ."

"Yes, I and Basso . . ." interrupted the second, who came up in still greater consternation.

"Speak one of you at a time," said Sundar. "I ask you where is the Princess?"

"We do not know," both said together, "but we are frightened out of our wits."

"So I think, blockheads," said Sundar. "What is it has scared you so?"

"Oh Bhagwan," said Sumbha, "Basso has seen such a sight! Your Highness would not believe your eyes!"

"What new absurdity is this?" shouted Sundar. "Give me a direct answer or by Heaven . . ."

"Why, Maharaj, if it please Your Highness to hear me," said the poor fellow, "Basso and I . . ."

"Yes, I and Sumbha, . . ." cried his comrade.

"Did I not forbid you to speak both at a time?" said the Raja. "You Sumbha, for the other fool seems more distracted than you are. What is the matter?"

"My gracious Maharaj, Basso and I, according to Your Highness's orders, went to search for the Princess, but being

afraid that we might meet the ghost of our young lord, Your Highness's son, Mahatmas rest his soul, as he has not received proper burial . . . "

" Sot," cried Sundar in a rage. " Is it only a ghost then that you have seen? "

" Oh worse! Worse, my lord! " cried Basso. " I had rather have seen ten ghosts! . . . "

" Grant me patience," said Sundar; " these blockheads distract me. Out of my sight Basso! And you, Sumbha, tell me in one word, are you sober? Are you raving? You would want to have some sense. Has the other frightened himself and you, too? Speak! What is it he fancies he has seen? "

" Why, Bhagwan," replied Sumbha, as he trembled with fear, " I was going to tell Your Highness, that since the calamitous misfortune of my young Prince, may Holy Ganges rest his soul, not one of us, Your Highness's faithful slaves—indeed we are, Maharaj, though poor men—I say, not one of us has dared to set a foot about the castle terrace, but two together; so Basso and I, thinking that the Princess might be in the great gallery, went up there to look for her and tell her that Your Highness wished to vouchsafe the Darshan of his face to her."

" Oh blundering fools! " shouted Sundar, " and, in the meantime, she has made her escape, because you were afraid of ghosts! Why, you sons of jackals, she left me in the gallery; I came from there myself."

" She may be there still for aught I know," said Sumbha; " but the devil shall have me before I seek her there again. Poor Basso, I do not think he will ever recover from it! "

" Recover what? " said Sundar. " Am I never to learn what it is has terrified these rascals? But I lose time; follow me, slave. I will see if she is in the gallery."

" For heaven's sake, august master," begged Sumbha, " do not go to the gallery! The Unclean One himself, I believe, is in the next room to the gallery."

Sundar, who hitherto had treated the terror of his servants as an idle panic, was struck at this new affair. He recollected the apparition of the statue, and the sudden closing of the

door at the end of the gallery—his voice faltered and he asked with disorder:

"What is in the great chamber?"

"Maharaj," said Sumbha, "when Basso and I came into the gallery he went first, for he said he had more courage than I. So when we came into the gallery we found nobody. We looked under every bench and stool, and still we found nobody."

"Were all the gods and statues in their places?" said Sundar.

"Yes, Maharaj," answered Sumbha, "but we did not think of looking at them very closely."

"Well, well," said Sundar impatiently, "proceed."

"When we came to the door of the great chamber," continued Sumbha, "we found it shut."

"And could not you open it?" said Sundar.

"Oh yes, Maharaj; would to heaven we had not!" replied he. "Nay, it was not I either, it was Basso; he was grown foolhardy and would go on, though I advised him not—if ever I open a door that is shut again . . ."

"Trifle not," commanded Sundar, "but tell me what you saw in the great chamber on opening the door."

"I, Maharaj," said Sumbha, "I saw nothing; I was behind Basso; but I heard the footstep; clump, clump, the striking of a hard stone against another."

"Sumbha," said Sundar in a solemn tone of voice, "tell me, I demand by the souls of my ancestors, what was it you saw? What was it you heard?"

"It was Basso who saw it, Maharaj; it was not I," replied Sumbha: "I only heard the footfall: clump, clump, clump. Basso had no sooner opened the door than he yelled with fear, and ran back. I, too, ran."

Basso, with horror in his eyes, muttered the holy Muntaras between his chattering teeth.

"But where is Basso?" asked Sundar. "Get him here."

Basso, having seen what he had, was by now in the safety of his bed, and swore that his head would part company with his body before he ever again stepped out of his bed,

lest the marble statue of the Raja's ancestor again pursued him.

"H'm!" grunted Sundar thoughtfully, for his experience with the walking statue of a short while ago was not dissimilar to what these servants related. But, being a Raja, he had to show some courage.

"Lead me to this statue!" he commanded.

But they bared their heads, and, placing their tulwars in their palms, proffered them to Sundar, meaning thereby that their heads had better be cut off before they were willing to accompany the Raja to this vision of the marble statue: for the tradition was well known. It said:

> "The Great Bell of the Temple shall tinkle, the statue of cold marble shall walk, when the House of the Raja is to go into the possession of the rightful owners. But the end will be, so said the Guro, when the Temple Idol of the Wise Ganish shall drop five tears from its eyes."

So had the peasant boy also recited in the streets, till Sundar had him placed under the Great Bell to be suffocated.

A consternation now raged in the Raja's bosom. His purpose of marrying Chandi, her escape, the appearance of traditional portents, all clouded his thoughts: but they clouded his ideas for a brief space of time only. The reader of stars had said that, "the Raja Sundar would lose all dear to him at the age which was now dawning upon him: nevertheless, so added the Sages of mighty Himalayas, the Raja will always pursue women that have been banned to him."

This Sundar resolved to destroy, not as a point of baseless superstition: but somehow this prophecy of the Court Astrologer seemed to spur him on to that which hurried his doom.

Thus it was that he ordered the peasant youth to be placed in a cell again to await his fate on the morrow; and sought the adjoining palace where dwelt his Rani and daughter, the matchless Moti.

His daughter and wife rose as the Raja entered the ladies'

apartment. The Rani, taking the gold plate on which reposed the sacred paste of sandalwood, cast it before her husband to ward off the evil influences that may have been dogging his footsteps. Moti sprinkled rose-water over the Raja Sundar's left shoulder to court good fortune upon her father. "I know the laws of Shastras," began the Raja: "but I know, too, another law. The first religious injunction prohibits me," he addressed his Rani, "to divorce you. But, bah! what do I care for any law? I shall obey only my own will. Henceforth you are divorced. I must have a son, many sons, too, to rule in my stead. I have as much use for a barren woman as for the withered acacia tree."

Leaving his daughter and wife, and standing by what he said, he ordered the high priest, Guro, to be summoned immediately, in order to perform his marriage with Chandi: for, if Chandi had taken refuge in the Temple of the Guro, as he by now was so informed, Chandi must be brought from his sanctuary. No laws governed Sundar. He was the law.

And, furthermore, the Guro who had given refuge to Chandi should be the man to solemnize his marriage, whether it was so written in the Shastras or not: for he would have the world know that Sundar ruled in that territory, and what Sundar said should be done. Moral precepts, even religious conceptions, according to the Raja, were subject to a ruler's whims and fancies: too much observance of them outraged the authority of the king, and Sundar was that King.

When the Guro led Chandi out of the Temple, she wept bitterly as is the wont of women who know no better.

"Weep not, my child!" said the priest, "for I shall tell thee all."

As they walked towards the palace the Guro related the whole story. She knelt and kissed his sandals.

"Oh father, father!" Again she wept, now in gratitude to the mighty gods that reside amongst the folds of the Himalayas. "My long-lost father!" she sobbed in glee as they walked towards the palace.

Now, although the Guro had come to take up his residence in the sacred Temple only a short while, his gentle behaviour, his constant nightly prayers and his kind pleading in favour of the people had already endeared him to the hearts of the men of Begamabad. The older women, too, had more than a mere suspicion that the Guro was of a different make than a forlorn priest. So had some of them remarked to the youth about his father when he played the flute in the bazaar and recited the hoary tradition heralding the oncoming rightful owner of the kingdom.

Not a word, however, did the youth reply either to this remark about his Guro-father in the Temple, or to their questioning as to whether it was not Sundar himself who poisoned his own son in order to gain the hand of Chandi, to whom the heir of Begamabad was wedded but an hour. The youth took no notice of such babbling tongues as he had wended his way through the weekly market gathering, for who knows the truth when women's tongues get loosened?

So even as the Guro passed with Chandi through the street in the outskirts of the capital to Sundar's palace, women, leaving their pot-scrubbing, sighed over his fate. Word had reached them, but the holy man knew nothing of what the Raja had decreed against him as soon as he had sealed the marriage according to the ancient rites of Hindustan.

"May the Mahatmas that dwell in the mighty Ganges help him!" they prayed. "May the tulwar of Sundar rend in twain before he strikes the Guro after the marriage!" hoped another woman, as he, the Guro, led Chandi past the thatched hut of the cobbler: but of this the priest took no notice and they walked on.

To the presence of Sundar they were ushered at once. The Raja had already donned his regal raiments as Chandi and the Guro advanced to the threshold of the Hall of Audience.

"Hasten with the marriage!" ordered the Raja; "wed me with Chandi before this woman may change her travel-worn dress."

The Guro tarried a moment.

"Is it not customary to pay a priest the price of his services on such an occasion as this?" asked the priest—the reward being the immediate acquittal of the peasant youth, so that he was soon present to be an additional witness of the marriage contract.

"I am bound with the laws of the Shastras!" then spoke the Guro, "and as a second marriage, however, dictated by the will of a Prince is to be solemnized, it cannot take effect till a purification ceremony is performed at my temple; after which, it is easy to wed before the god of wisdom, the mighty Ganish: for only Ganish can forgive one who during the lifetime of his Rani seeks a new bride."

"Oh holy priest!" sobbed a courtier. "This Highness of ours, this master of my shaven skull, is, oh! oh! . . . how can I say it! He is now a widower scarce an hour ago: for . . ."

The Raja cut him short. "Yes, Ramlal speaks the truth. As soon as I emerged from the apartment of the Rani, after making my pleasure known to her and Moti, my daughter, both must have been seized with some sudden malady: for even now I cannot believe that they drank of the deadly poison and lay on the floor dead, dead like stone; a rose clutched between their fingers, and a curious, happy smile on their faces. . . . But enough of this worrying song. It has so happened, and none can alter it. So let me be wed and now: and what tarries thee?" he asked the priest.

His lustful eyes fell upon Chandi, the Princess whom he thought would now be his, for do not deceive thyself that the Raja knew all of the Princess's relationship with the Guro. His "jackals" had informed him; the rest he guessed, so that, if the Guro solemnized the marriage, the world could be told that it was the father of the bride himself who bestowed his daughter upon Sundar.

The going away of Mahadi Rao, the rightful ruler of Begamabad, on a Benares pilgrimage to become a Yogi for the rest of his life after the death of his wife, and leaving his infant children, who grew to be Chandi and now the disguised peasant youth, in the care of his Chief Minister,

was a story which had passed into a tale of long ago. Only the old women of the city spoke of it when spinning their winter wool for the Moon Fair. And Sundar knew not only this, but more he knew—that Guro was no other than Maharaj Mahadi Rao himself. But Sundar's blood was younger than that of the priest: also Sundar knew how to slay people if they opened their mouths over much.

Further, was Sundar not going to marry into the rightful family, and thus claim the throne as the property of his would-be wife Chandi?

Of course, if the ancient Diwan, the Chief Minister, had told him of the legend of the Temple Bell, he also told him on his death-bed that he, the Diwan, occupied the throne only as a representative of the Prince who had gone to Benares; and that he, Sundar, was to hold it on the same terms. But Sundar was of a different mind. His sword was mightier by far than the old caravan tales of tinkling bells, and he scorned those who renounced the throne in disgust when their beloved wives died.

"Pha!" he often said to himself. "A young man and prince-ruler should make his own destiny. The old Diwan laughed in his beard when he spoke of wrath descending, of the curse of the Temple. His ideas died with his ashes that I have sprinkled over the waves of the Ganges."

Yet Sundar had a fear in his heart that what was related to him might be true. If he could, he would make it otherwise: for was he not Sundar, the gallant young prince, who should have many sons to carry on his name?

And Sundar, his way now clear, insisted upon his marriage taking place with no delay. There and then he would be wed.

"Proceed with the ceremony!" he shouted to the priest.

Just then the tinkling of the bell was heard; there was consternation in the courtyard, men ran hither and thither, for the report was rife that tears had dropped from the eyes of the god of wisdom.

Sundar beckoned the priest to follow him. The courtiers were to remain in the Hall of Audience.

"You cannot hide from me," said the Raja to the priest,

" that you are no other than Mahadi Rao, the rightful ruler of this State."

The Guro muttered the holy Muntaras, for he heard the tinkling of the great Temple Bell once again as they sat alone in the adjoining ante-chamber.

" You also know," continued Sundar, " that I have soldiers, treasury and power to have all your efforts stifled, should you make the slightest move."

" The Mahatmas, those holy souls that dwell beyond the jungles of the Himalayas," intoned the Guro, " are more worthy, more powerful than all thy soldiery and gold. They are my help."

" Ah! You still believe in superstitions? " jeered the Raja.

" Open not thy mouth so wide," snapped the Guro. " Thou and thy father were only the crumb-bearers of mine table."

" Cool thy head awhile," continued the Raja, " let the Mahatmas remain where they are at the moment. Suppose I wed thy daughter, and proclaim from the throne that after me thou, as my religious adviser, shall be the ruler of this State . . . "

The Guro would have leaped to the Raja's throat: but years of a life of austerity had tempered his wrath, and he listened, and then thought awhile.

" So let it be," he agreed, " and I call upon the Serpent God to do justice in this case."

" Now the Serpent God, my holy priest-king? " laughed Sundar, " thou dost detach thy allegiance from god to god; but be it as you say, let the Serpent God decide—when he will. Meantime, we shall wed, thy daughter be my Rani and thee the ruler-designate."

In the Durbar, with pomp and show consistent with the dignity of the State, the priest solemnized the wedding. Chandi did not seem to mind it; perhaps she guessed the secret, as her brother, once a disciple-peasant and now decked in fine court dress, led her to her bridal chamber. Not till the dusk was he to leave his sister alone.

Till evening the Guro prayed at the shrine of the stone

image of the Serpent God. At least once he imagined that he saw the stone carving of a hooded cobra move; there was a definite colour of vermilion and white over the petals of lotus flower carved on the rock. The flower may have swayed, too, he thought; but the serpent did certainly eject his forked tongue and swallow it up again. But all this may be a play of fancy, for the Guro prayed fervently because he loved Chandi more than any other father did his daughter—for was she not the image of her mother?

Evening light was paling over the tops of the sycamore trees when the Raja espied his newly-wed Chandi on the marble terrace.

"Thou art the pearl that could buy kingdoms!" he addressed her. "For thee, O the lily of the sacred pond of love, mine heart has hungered as the desert wanderers are athirst for water."

Chandi's thoughts were far away, for it was the justice of the Cobra God that she awaited; and yet she did not comprehend how that justice would be made apparent, till, perceiving her father on the other side of the terrace, she leaped with joy.

"Oh father-prince!"—but the Guro placed his hand over her lips.

"Hush, child of mine heart, hush! The god has answered; even as I prayed, it swayed its hood. Justice will be done."

Sundar was not surprised to see the Guro discard priestly garb and now disport a prince's robes: for, judging according to his standard, he thought that the Guro required little coaxing before he would prefer to live in idle luxury as the guest of the palace by marrying his daughter to the ruler of the State of Begamabad.

After brief salutations the Guro retired, leaving Sundar and the bride at the terrace, for all male members of the household must leave the wedding-chamber as soon as the darkness falls.

The heat and much excitement of the day had fatigued the Raja: so, placing his head in Chandi's lap, he reposed in the coolness of the garden.

The Temple Bell tinkled again, and sent shivers through Chandi's frame.

" Dispel thy foolish fears, dear fairy of my heart," said Sundar. " What can be greater glory than to be wed to a man who rules and lives to rule?"

" Have I not to be thankful, too," he continued, almost dozingly in the soft wafting of garden air, " that I have now the loveliest of women as my bride? "

Then Chandi placed a bunch of jasmine flowers under his head as is the custom of the newly-wed, and stood fanning him with the scented fan: and then, overcome with exhaustion and the coolness, he fell asleep.

But Chandi was gone. Gone to her father to ask what he thought was meant by the answer vouchsafed to him by the gods. What was the justice of the serpent? When was it to come? She was impatient and inwardly rebuking her father for having given her in marriage to a wicked Raja like Sundar.

The Guro knew his gods. He had prayed before. He had no doubt they would answer.

" Thy cheeks are as the cheeks of the morning dawn, thy tresses as jet and smooth as the cobra. Thy teeth . . . " So mumbled Sundar in his sleep as he lay under the jasmine creeper on his marble terrace.

" Thy tresses indeed are smooth . . . "—and then a hissing sound and a bite choked his words. A cobra had stolen on the terrace. Entwining the branches of the creeper, it slithered to where Sundar lay; the Raja had stroked him, thinking it to be the long tresses of his beloved Chandi.

The venom soon spread: and in the light of torches they discovered him in death agony. The serpent still clung to the jasmine creeper and then slid away into the thicket below.

Mahadi Rao was king again. For the Serpent God had " spoken " in favour of the rightful ruler.

The Princess who was a Prince

Two Egyptian students of theology, who had travelled far from their land in search of knowledge, then began their stories of the uncanny Sheikh, and the younger one regaled us with the rollicking story of an old man who had married a young wife: and it was a fitting tribute to Mirza Isfindari of Isfahan—a budding follower of law—now a pilgrim by compulsion, to relate to us the story of the Princess who was a Prince, which has filled the romantic glens of Azerbaijan with that imaginative renown which is the true Aryan's birthright.

"Rise, rise, for the morning prayer," called the Mullah: and we fellow-pilgrims dispersed for ever the next day to the several countries of our origin after this wondrous Golden Pilgrimage.

. . . . .

There was a Shah of Persia who made it his boast that he would bring beneath his sway every principality within a thousand miles of his capital, unless the rulers of these states each presented him with his most beautiful daughter to grace his seraglio. And so fearful were the princes of the surrounding territories, that they anxiously hastened to comply with his demand.

But the Sultan of Azerbaijan was in a quandary. He had seven daughters, but every one of them was more ugly than the other. The Princess Peri had ears like miniature fans; the Princess Fatima, because of her corpulence, had gained the sobriquet of "the Sultan's Little Elephant," the Princess Bûbu was a dwarf—and so on, each having her peculiar deformity. To present any of these to the Shah of Persia, one of the most famous connoisseurs of female beauty in the world, was simply to court immediate invasion, and the conclusion of the native line of Azerbaijan.

So the Sultan bewailed his deficiency in daughters. "Lo!" he cried, "here have I seven useless wenches on my hands who do nothing but quarrel and stuff themselves with

rahat loukum from morning to night, and when danger threatens me and the gift of one or other would avert it, none of them is of any avail. Surely Allah has afflicted me for some secret sin that I wot not of."

And in his agony he sought the advice of his only son, the Prince Muza. Now Muza was the son of a Circassian woman whom the Sultan had loved very much, and whom he had elevated to the rank of his principal wife. And Prince Muza was by far the handsomest young man in Azerbaijan. On the day he was called into counsel with his father, he was just seventeen, and like the sun to look upon, with his bright golden curls, Greek nose and Cupid's mouth. But withal he was one of the most warlike princes in Islam, and already had proved himself a valiant fighter in the wars with the Feringhees. His lithe girlish shape held more strength and activity than that of many a seeming Hercules, and in native subtlety not the wisest doctors and Imams could match him.

He joined his father in the summer pavilion in the midst of the lake, a palace of glass where the old man was wont to amuse himself at chess with the Vizier. The Sultan was a bad chess player, but the Vizier was a worse, and that was why he liked to play chess with him. And when the Prince arrived the Sultan had just given check to the Vizier's King.

"Alas!" he cried, "that so easily I may give check to this piece of ivory which bears the name of King, and that I cannot with equal simplicity give pause to this tyrant of Persia. For what did Allah give me wit if not to defend mine own possessions?"

"Be not troubled, my father," said Prince Muza softly, for his voice was like a young girl's. Young as I am, I believe I have solved the difficulty which causes you such vexation."

"My son," replied the Sultan hopefully, "you are young indeed, but well am I aware that few either in the East or the West possess your ready wit and excellent good sense. Come, then, reveal to us the manner in which we can placate this Shah who wants a wife from every land from Sinim to Africa."

"Being a man and a soldier," said Prince Muza, "I do not use a mirror. Yet have I caught sight of myself in my mother's looking-glass, and know that it has pleased Allah the Merciful to give me the lineaments of a fair young woman. I propose, Your Majesty, that you send me to the Shah of Persia as your handsomest daughter."

"What?" bellowed the Sultan. "Are you in your senses? I have heard and read that great mental brilliance frequently verges on madness, but I did not suspect such gifts as yours of imbecile admixture. You speak folly, my son."

"Not so fast, Your Majesty," droned the Vizier, "for I think I can see much wisdom in the suggestion. Let us hear the Prince to the end."

"My father," said Muza, "what is your chief objection to the scheme, if I may ask as much?"

Now the Sultan was flustered. "In the name of Eblis," he shouted, "did any man ever put such a question to another? But since you are so lacking in acumen, let me take you further. You betake yourself to the Shah in the guise of a bride. The nuptials are duly celebrated, the bridal chamber is reached . . ."

At this point the Prince was seized with uncontrollable laughter. Peal upon peal resounded through the pavilion. The Vizier at last joined in it, but the Sultan grew red and still redder, and in his annoyance upset the chess-board.

"Sire," said the Prince at last, when he could speak coherently. "Pardon me, I beg of you, but surely you cannot but believe that such a contingency must have occurred to me."

"And how do you propose to circumvent it?" demanded the Sultan angrily.

"That, Sire, you must leave to me," replied his son very gravely. "All I ask is that you send me to Persia in the guise of a bride with a following suitable to my supposed estate. Have no fear that I shall not return in due course, and that I shall readily enough disembarrass myself of this Shah who seeks wives from the ends of the earth."

And so perforce the Sultan was compelled to leave the matter in this case. The Prince was provided with the richest feminine apparel that the principality could muster, jewels, silks and muslins which the chief Sultana of the Commander of the Faithful herself might have envied. And on the tenth day from that on which the scheme was first mooted, Prince Muza set off for Isfahan, the Capital of Persia with a suite which made the peoples of the intervening provinces stare in sheer amazement. Yet every man in the train had been sworn to secrecy concerning the plan on pain of death. But indeed they were much too fearful of results to betray it.

And in due time the train reached the ancient and princely city of Isfahan, where the "Princess" and her suite were received with royal honours. And straightway she was brought to the Shah, where he sat in state in the great marble and golden palace of his ancestors. As Muza approached the throne with the grace of a gazelle, his face hidden beneath a cloud of veiling muslin, the Shah started and sat erect, clutching the jewelled arms of his great chair. Here was beauty of form! Compared with such a shape the other princesses who had been sent in tribute seemed clumsy and bucolic. A very houri, he would swear!

So, after formal greeting, he invited Muza to the apartments in the seraglio which had been arranged for the reception of the Princess of Azerbaijan, and himself conducted him thence. And hardly had the threshold been crossed when he said:

"Fairest Princess, for that such a divine form is not accompanied by a most lovely countenance, I cannot believe, deign to unveil and display the transcendant beauty of your face to your fortunate lord."

With a great show of modesty which well pleased the Shah, Muza slowly, tantalizingly, raised the folds of muslin which shrouded his face. And when the Shah gazed upon him, feasting his eyes on the peach-like skin, the ruby mouth, and the large and lustrous eyes, his heart beat quickly, and his breath came and went in little sobs, so beautiful was the seeming maiden."

" Oh miracle of loveliness, pearl of the earth," he panted, " grant that our nuptials be celebrated without delay."

" Sire," whispered Muza, veiling his eyes with their long lashes, " my desire is Your Majesty's. But there is one vow I have made to myself, a vow given to Allah, that the man who weds me must first defeat me in wrestling. Bear with me, Sire, but so it is, and, as you well know, such a vow cannot be broken."

Now the Shah laughed loudly, for he was the strongest and most skilful wrestler in all his dominions. But he was knowledgeable in the whims of womankind, and much too wise to thwart them."

" Charming Princess," he said, " your vow is surely a strange one, yet have I heard vows even more fantastic. When is it your pleasure that we wrestle? "

" Whenever Your Majesty pleases," answered Muza, dropping his veil.

" Now," thought the Shah, " it will be the quickest way to hold this paragon in my arms," and then aloud. " Why not at once, Princess? "

" As Your Majesty chooses," murmured Muza demurely.

So at the Shah's bidding a wrestling mattress was brought in, and the combatants prepared themselves. The Shah stripped to the waist, his great muscles rising on arms and chest like brown ropes. But as for Muza, his chest remained covered, although his arms were bare, and he tucked the ample red silk trousers he wore up to the knee.

" Now," said the Shah with a smile, and the pair locked arms. It seemed the sorriest farce. Laughing, the Shah playfully tried to raise Muza in his arms—and found himself lying on his back.

He rose with a puzzled frown. " Surely this is black art," he complained. " Where, Princess did you learn such a trick? "

" Sire," said Muza, " you were not sufficiently on your guard. Try again."

" The Shah, supposing he had slipped, engaged again and this time with more caution. Indeed, he grasped Muza in such an unpleasantly ardent hold that the Prince gasped

for breath. So he tramped as sharply as he could on the Shah's instep. The Shah, in agony with the pain, released his hold, whereupon the crafty Muza dived to the floor, caught the royal ankles firmly, and threw the Persian monarch to the mattress with such force that he lay unconscious.

The royal eunuchs, scandalized at what had occurred, hurried to their master's aid. They held perfumes to his nostrils and shook him gently, but it was not until Muza vigorously rubbed his ears that he came to himself again.

The Shah sat up and laid a hand tenderly on the back of his head. "By Allah!" he whispered, "but are all the maidens of Azerbaijan like to you?"

By this time Muza had resumed his veil, and bowed low as he answered demurely: "Most, Sire, are far stronger and more skilful than I. I have seven sisters, any one of whom looks much more manly than I," which was precisely the truth.

"Thanks to the Compassionate One that I did not marry them all," remarked the Shah piously.

"But, Sire, you have not yet married me," said Muza, "nor is it possible for you to do so in face of my vow until you defeat me in wrestling."

"Umph," said the Shah rather sourly, "we will leave that for another day, Princess. For the present, however, it will prove much too dull for you to be shut up in apartments of your own, so I propose that you take up your quarters in my seraglio."

Now the Shah in making this proposal considered himself exceedingly clever, but it was precisely the move which Muza wished him to make. However, he dissembled.

"What, Your Majesty!" he cried, as if dreadfully shocked "Your seraglio, according to the Persian custom, is a habitation for your wives alone, and I am neither your wife, nor yet one of that subsidiary class which (here he wound his veil more tightly round his head) scarcely rank as wives."

But the Shah was angry with the "Princess" whom he had sworn to humiliate because he had been beaten at his own favourite sport. It was his intention to inveigle "her"

into his harem, and to compel "her" to remain there as a mere concubine. If she attempted any of her wrestling tricks, well, his eunuchs would soon put an end to that.

"Your suspicions are unworthy of you, fair Princess," he said haughtily. "In my seraglio you will be as safe as in your father's palace," and without more ado he conducted her to the great house where his five hundred wives and women resided.

This was a terrible place, and that any man who was not a shah or a sultan could have tolerated such an atmosphere it is difficult to believe. For continual tumult reigned there as though it were a great cage of cockatoos or macaws. But an odd thing befel at the entrance of Muza, for every one of the five hundred dames and damsels without exception at once grew profoundly quiet, so that as he trod the luxurious carpets of the gilded place in his sinuous approach one might have heard the dropping of a hairpin.

This, of course, the Shah took for mere curiosity, so dull are men, even princes of the greatest power and experience. And as it was the custom of the women to unveil at the advent of their liege lord, these five hundred matchless beauties, the pearls of the East, dark, brunette, fair, plump or slender, divinely tall or daintily petite, Persian, Afghan, Circassian, Arab or Egyptian, all turned their star-like gaze on the still shrouded form of Muza with such an expression of envy (or so the Shah took it to be) that he chuckled in his beard and rubbed his great hands together in glee.

"Ah, ha," thought he, "patience, my moon-faced ones, and you shall behold a spectacle which will turn your hearts to little pits of hatred." Then with an obeisance to the "Princess" of Azerbaijan, he requested her to unveil.

With a regal movement, the swathing muslin was thrown back, and the result of this gesture thoroughly nonplussed the Shah. He had expected a murmurous outburst of envious criticism, but when a deep and prolonged sigh resounded from five hundred pairs of ruby lips, he was utterly at a loss.

From the dais where reclined the favourite to the balconies above where the choicest beauties of the Orient were

clustered like flowers, aye to the farthest alcove of the great gilded hall that sigh re-echoed in a perfervid note of longing which baffled him. Yet there were many ladies present who in mere rapturous beauty could readily surpass the newcomer. True it was that none could boast of the exceeding grace of the Princess of Azerbaijan, none were her match in deportment and vivacity of movement, which were probably due to her skill and practice in athletics, and he trusted that her presence in the seraglio might provoke an emulation in carriage and activity which had hitherto been somewhat lacking among ladies who seemed to prefer lolling on heaped-up cushions to movement of any kind.

Smilingly he took his farewell of the Princess, and left the seraglio. No sooner had he gone than every woman it contained rushed to surround the newcomer and ply her with questions. She must sit beside the Princess of Trelijand, she must share the comfits of the black-browed beauty from Damascus, the grapes and medlars of the Circassian damsel were hers for the asking.

The seraglio was in an uproar. In vain the eunuchs strove to keep order. The Greeks swore that Muza was especially their friend, because "she" was fair, they placed garlands on his head and covered his arms with bracelets. The Egyptians, who believed in colour contrasts, wound their lithe arms round his neck, and snuggled their brown cheeks to his. Angered, the Greek maidens slapped the brown arms. The Egyptians returned scratches for the slaps, and clung to their new acquaintance desperately. In the struggle Muza's dress became disarranged at the throat. A girl from Alexandria and another from Bessarabia both noticed at once that the breast of the Princess of Azerbaijan was covered with a soft golden down, soft but thick. This, far from appearing as a disadvantage in a new lady friend, seemed to make them more anxious than ever to make her closer acquaintance, so that in the end poor Muza was all but smothered among the rarest female charms in the world.

But other than Greek and Egyptian damsels had a shrewd eye for the turn of events. The eunuchs had also observed the deshabille of the Princess and what it revealed, and took

hurried counsel with one another. The Shah must be told. That he would be enraged they could scarcely doubt, but told he must be. So the Chief Eunuch went sadly to tell him.

When all was said, the Shah sat on his throne glaring at the Chief Eunuch like a lion in his wrath. Then by degrees his face softened, his eyes wrinkled in a smile, and he roared aloud. So loudly did he roar in his glee that the Chief Eunuch, thinking he was exceedingly angry, cast himself on his face and devoted himself to death.

There was a long pause. Then the Shah said mysteriously. "Bring the Princess of Azerbaijan before me." And when at last Muza was brought, the Shah looked upon him long and shrewdly.

"O most charming Princess," he said slowly, "I have considered the matter of our marriage with pious care, and although I rate your beauty and virtue most highly, it does not seem good to me that a wife should be a better wrestler than her husband. True, no man can say that there is in the Book aught against such an accomplishment in a spouse; only it does not appear seemly to me that as ruler of this great realm I should take to wife one who can so easily overthrow me. Moreover, although your beauty of feature cannot be gainsaid I have learned that your bosom is hirsute as that of a young man—a decided blemish in one so comely. Taking everything together, then, I judge it best that you should return with all speed to Azerbaijan, where, doubtless, your peculiar type of beauty is more appreciated. And so I bid you farewell."

And Muza, thinking of how he had thrown the Shah, put the leagues between himself and Isfahan at a speed quite surprising in one so ladylike.

The Prince of Liars

There in Sindh, like Amjere, another Shrine claims allegiance of those who bow to the philosophy of the great Sufi Order of Naqshbundi. Men and women of all nationalities throughout the Asia betake themselves to it: and, more especially, the Central Asian peoples.

When we arrived at the Shrine, a large convoy of Uzbeks from Samarkand had descended upon the city. Dreamy-eyed sons of distant Turkestan were still wearing their felt boots round about the caravan sarai with less concern than they would have in Bokhara.

Little camp fires were lit in the courtyard of the caravan sarai. Some eighteen pilgrims sat around the common bonfire. Large appetites were satisfied. Green tea had been quaffed; rosaries had fallen from the hands of the more devout, as a gallant son of far-off Ferghana, that part of Central Asia where no outside influence had trickled deep enough to change the mind of those lovable people, spoke of a man who was famed in the hills. He may be related to the court story-tellers of the Amir. Here is what he said about the Prince of Liars:

Sikandar was a man amongst men of Tulwar. He belonged to that class of semi-nomad Uzbeks of Central Asia who inhabit the glen passes of Ferghana in Turkestan. His hobby was horse-thieving. This hobby had grown such a passion with him that he now preferred the hobby to the craft of the sword. Also he could speak nothing but the untruth, and laughed always overmuch: and yet people loved the merry liar.

By traditional association he ought to have been taking part in an internal war beyond the Ama Darya, for the recalcitrant Chieftain, Gul Khan, had taken up arms against his master, Amir Zulfiqar, the ruler of Ferghana in Turkestan.

But such a war had not drawn Sikandar; for many of his kinsmen who were with the rebel Chief had secretly conveyed the news to him that the battle was worthless.

The troopers of neither side hoped for any chance of plunder, also the pay was in arrears.

Sikandar could not be with such bankrupt parties. The cause did not matter to him. Like most men of Ferghana, he, too, was poor. His usual method hitherto had been to steal horses to remove that poverty.

Many knew that he had cured his ills of hunger, but few minded, for he was an inveterate liar, a great companion, and could laugh louder than any man in the land of Turkestan. So also the caravan leaders had said, whose horses occasionally disappeared with the skill of Sikandar. Therefore, rascal as he was, he was liked.

Now all this was before he had an encounter with the Amir's Khabarchees.

These Khabarchees were a hated lot. Mostly they were recruited from the lowest of the low of the Amir's subjects. Their work consisted of spying. If there was nothing to spy for, they were able to make some excuse for it: for they were paid by results. And they were paid not in coin but in kind. If a man was "caught" by them and condemned—as such men were always condemned, because another Khabarchee appeared as witness—the reward of the captor was the personal effects of the victim, as, for example, his turban, his money-belt, his turquoise ring, even his sandals, if wearable.

This Sikandar knew, and on that score hated the Khabarchees. So hated were the spies that many men of Ferghana had murdered these Khabarchees and given thanksgiving prayer for it as a good action—of course, if the Chief of the Khabarchees had not had their heads cut off already.

That particular night Sikandar was very poor, and he wanted someone's horse, so he paced the dark passages of the city of Ferghana. Little did he think of meeting a Khabarchee.

His feet cut into the darkness of the alleys. There was no one about. Not even a stray dog barked. "If I meet the Amir's spies, what then?" thought Sikandar. But he was desperate.

Under the overhanging balconies of the houses he walked;

not a sound could he hear. A few more turns and he would be near the stables of the Aqshabashi. Had the Amir not given the Aqsha, the head cook, one of the finest royal horses for making such a delightful dish of Palau that night? That is the horse to get, thought Sikandar.

As he walked his hunger distressed him. Then some radiance leaped into his heart. It was his conscience. " But why must I always steal to live? " he rebuked himself.

Soon the Shaitan, the devil-devil-impulse that is in all of us, threw a mantle over that radiant disk in Sikandar's heart. The horse was not the real property of the head cook; he did not deserve it, for he did not cook the dish that so delighted the Amir, some under-cook prepared it. The Aqshabashi merely served it to his royal master: hence Sikandar thought that it was an ill-gotten horse.

And what is ill-gotten by one person can be taken from him. Sikandar was the man to get that horse. Also, what does a cook do with a horse? He was too fat to ride it, anyway.

So resolving, Sikandar paced stealthily behind the cart-shed, avoiding the babbling dromedaries munching their food beside their loads, past the mulberry avenue, and came near to the stable of the Aqshabashi. He could almost see the gate of the stable, grey and gaunt, as it stood peeping behind a clump of toot trees.

A horse neighed in the distance. Was it the horse on which Sikandar had set his mind? It gave him an exhilarating feeling.

He had to cross yonder alley, and then for the clump of toot trees, up the tree, over the wall and then in the stall: on the royal horse, having unbolted the gate—how he would ride away; for he was amongst other things the best horseman of his clan.

But just then something moved in the shadow of the high wall. Could it be human? It was.

Wonder of all wonders, a Khabarchee lurked in the alley.

Two curved knives leaped in the darkness. They interlocked. They rose again. Then only one remained in a living hand. It was Sikandar's.

Now, although the greatest of all horse-thieves, Sikandar hated murder. He would battle man to man; but what was he to do when a man stood between him and his "bread"? That horse he certainly must have that night.

Yet Sikandar was afraid. Afraid of the Amir's wrath: for the great ruler considered such lurking pests as his eyes and ears. Without their reports, how could he know what was going on in his realm?

Sikandar thought now of his whole skin; especially round his neck, which might not be whole once the Amir decided to behead him for murder. Who could convince the Amir that a man had no right to stand in the way of a hungry man with a horse, the sale of which would bring him food? A crime was a crime to him.

Then he ran towards the high hill where lived the old merchant of Kabul. Maybe the merchant, being very old, was dead, or too deep in meditation to rescue Sikandar. But thither he went as fast as his legs could carry him.

A faint light still shone above the portal. The horse-thief knocked four times. The light in the room was put out. A voice asked the meaning of that interruption.

"Sikandar, thy friend, comes in peace!" replied the horse-thief.

"Laugh," spoke the merchant, "so that I may recognize thee aright."

Even at such a moment the sense of humour did not desert Sikandar, and he laughed—a laugh inimitable, that all men knew belonged to no one but Sikandar.

The merchant lowered the rope-ladder, for it was too late to open the giant gateway in bandit-ridden Ferghana.

"If thou art in need of friendship," spoke the merchant, "thou hast come to the right man." He remembered the occasion when it was Sikandar and no other, who, combating with robbers, had rescued the wealthy merchant these many moons ago, beyond the ford of the Oxus. That debt he would pay that night.

"The hour has struck when I must leave my native town," spoke Sikandar hurriedly.

He refused the green tea which the Kabul merchant placed before his guest.

The merchant beamed benignly at the horse-thief, then, stroking his beard, he said: "Of a truth, I have been told of your growing disregard of the Amir's secret agents!" He tarried to see the effect.

"Amir's Khabarchees be with the Shaitan!" cursed Sikandar. "I have just killed one . . . and by the beard of the Holy Pir, if the Amir is informed, even the camels of Bokhara will hear what an exemplary punishment was meted out to the horse-thief."

So the merchant of Kabul rose and called out to his wife that he would not be long away. Then Sikandar and he let themselves down the parapet by the rope-ladder.

"Wouldst thou go to the fair city of Kabul?" asked the Afghan merchant, as they walked through the mulberry avenue that skirted the town.

"Even to the lap of Satan I will go," blurted out Sikandar.

And though the merchant did not like such an epithet about his native country, he turned it into a joke.

"Remember, Sikandar," he said in that soft and gentle manner that he had, "if thou goest to mine native town, give mine salaams to Kabul, kiss the hands of mine grey-bearded brother. He will give thee even more friendship than this humble friend of thine."

Then jestingly. "Of course, there in Kabul," he said, "do not ply thy usual trade! But choose your own destination," as he pushed a purse of gold into Sikandar's hand.

In and out of the lanes they wended their way to the caravan sarai, for the dawn was not far off, and the camel train would even then be getting ready to start.

"What is this?" asked Sikandar, as he felt the purse in his hand.

"The twin brother of the one that I shall give thee," replied the merchant, "when thou art on a camel bound for the uplands of Kabul."

"Allah reward thee!" thanked the horse-thief, but even as they neared the yawning gateway of the caravan sarai, where Sikandar clasped his friend's hand to bid farewell,

huddled forms twisting themselves from the dark doorway fell upon them. Heavy felt, that protects the pack ponies from the chill air of Gulsitan range, was thrown over Sikandar and the merchant. Stout cords were entwined round them. Blows and sticks descended upon them.

"To the prison, to the prison!" shouted the hoarse voice of their leader.

The two tied up to the waist were flung over the forms of others, possibly similarly situated.

"These many years I have been true to the laws of mine religion and have given friendship to one who deserved it," spoke the muffled voice of the merchant, and as he wriggled himself towards another body, he continued: "But O! Sikandar, thy fate and mine had long decreed thuswise, and O! Sikandar . . . "

"Dry thy tongue, O the father of all the babblers," shouted the form to whom the merchant spoke, "I am no Sikandar, the horse-thief, for know in me the chief-head of the Amir's cook, the Aqshabashi, whose proffered dish did not agree too well with mine royal master at sundown feast of this night."

"And the chief cook's horse," thought Sikandar, as he lay at the farthest end of the cell! "Oh! why did I not steal that horse after all. I would have been away by now, beyond the confines of the Khanate, away into the Turkoman country."

But the dawn was soon upon them. The Amir's court was fully set; there were the usual retainers fetching and carrying his snuff-box, his green tea, his penholders. The warriors surrounded him, the chief executioner lingered not far from the "bower" of sabres and matchlock guns.

"Hold it tight," shouted the Amir to one of the men, when he let the pole of the awning droop slightly over him.

And this was the sign of great wrath of the Amir, as everyone knew when they brought the merchant and Sikandar before their master to be judged.

"What is the crime of these men?" asked the Amir gruffly, as the merchant of Kabul dragged his fettered legs beside Sikandar. "But ah! whom do I see—the prince of the horse-thieves?" shouted the ruler as he saw Sikandar.

"This man Sikandar was seen very late at night in the street of money-changers; one of my men followed him," began the chief of the Khabarchees. "When he was near the Khabarchee, he sprang . . ."

Instantly Sikandar swung round and struck the Afghan merchant, thus felling him to the ground.

In the entire history of Turkestan, none had witnessed such a scene before a monarch.

The guards bared their scimitars, fearing lest the prisoner, having gone off his head, might attack the Amir.

But the ruler knew his subjects.

"Rise to your feet!" he boomed to the two men. The guards withheld their blows.

Producing the purse of the gold mohars from the folds of his garment, Sikandar threw it at the feet of the Amir.

"Thy humble subject," he then spoke, "knows that thy sleep was disturbed last night by the cooking of a vile Aqshabashi; and, having regard for the welfare of my royal master," continued the horse-thief, "I shall spare thee, O the mighty Amir, any further headache and admit mine guilt of having stolen this purse from this Kabuli merchant. He need not have complained to thy Khabarchees. Hast thou not a hundred thousand jars full of gold?" Sikandar spat at the merchant.

"That is all about my guilt," resumed the horse-thief. "It is I, Sikandar, who is in the wrong." Then he gasped: "Let this fat merchant take his purse. O Amir of all the lands, let him go to his miserable house, though he does not deserve the gold!"

The Chief of Khabarchees with the full knowledge of Sikandar's real crime, the royal guards with the shock of the horse-thief's audacity, the merchant who so nobly befriended him and received a blow as his reward: everyone was dumbfounded with what they had seen and heard.

Not so the Amir. He merely blinked: and then he laughed, and laughed uproariously. Sikandar joined in the laughter, for he could never resist it.

"You! Oh, you, the younger brother of Shaitan!" the Amir spoke in between his great outburst of laughter.

"You are a priceless liar, the right hand spleen of Shaitan himself, you are! Oh! what a lie!" and the Amir rocked with yet more laughter.

"Tell me the truth now," commanded the Amir, when his mirth had abated a little, "and by the beard of my ancestor who rode to the golden domes of Russia, I shall let thee and thy merchant friend go unharmed."

"Thy wisdom is greater than that of the glorious Commander of the Faithful himself that sits in the cliff palace of Istamboul," chipped the horse-thief. "Aye, for sure this merchant is mine great friend who helped me to escape. But, let the morning star be my witness," continued Sikandar, "my blow was inflicted upon the Kabuli's mouth in his own interest. Allah knows I meant him no harm, but wished thus to have him released from the cruel fate that I feared would be mine."

The wise Amir listened in mute appreciation of the sparkling sacrifice of one man for another: then he addressed the merchant: "May Allah be with you, virtuous merchant of Kabul, return to thy house; and go in peace. He who harms thee, harms me."

"And what is it that hath brought thee here before me as a culprit?" asked the Amir. Sikandar's mind was working overtime to manufacture a fresh excuse for the murder which he had committed.

"This man, sire," began the chief of the spies, "is before my great master for a crime which I have under this blanket."

The Amir would not allow it to be removed. Instead, he rose and commanded that Sikandar should be taken to his palace, given food and clothing and prepared for a journey. By sundown he was to be made ready; and after the evening prayer the Amir would see him in his own royal apartments.

They gave him a full warrior's regalia, a fur-lined tunic, long boots, a turban that could not be dismantled, and a kamarband such as he had not dreamt of in his wildest dreams.

But Sikandar was always a man of action. He must be moving, doing something. He could not loll about on the

priceless Persian rugs or merely sit on the divans, carpeted as they were with the gorgeous Damascus tapestry, and look out of the palace window on the busy city bazaars.

For a time he sat thus, looking, wondering, and then his gaze was caught up by the wondrous face, all veiled and yet leaving sufficient for imagination to picture a woman's soul-stirring beauty.

The scent of freshly-used henna wafted to his nose, the blending perfume of musk and jasmine floated on the terrace under his window. He coughed slightly, but sufficiently loudly to attract the attention of a female attendant who walked beside the Amir's daughter.

Hefty hands dragged him back from the window. A whip trailed sharply over his back.

"Rascal of all rascals!" shouted the Amir. "Keep thy impure eyes blinded from gazing at my daughter!"

By way of filling his thoughts with less precious things, according to the Amir's way of thinking, he asked Sikandar to go down to his private jewel-house and beguile his time till the evening, when the travelling mission would be given to him.

The Amir was a man of the world. He knew that a horse-thief has little use for jewels; besides, even if Sikandar wanted to sell real jewels to anyone, he could not find a buyer in the whole kingdom, for his reputation as the master-liar of Turkestan would always make his customers doubtful of the genuineness of the jewels.

So Sikandar was safe enough in the jewel-house, thought the Amir; safer by far than accosting his womenfolk in the palace. Besides, there was only one man who could perform the mission in the manner that it had to be performed, and that man was Sikandar.

And thus the horse-thief would be kept under the eye of the Amir, for what caused the heart-ache of the ruler during the insurrection in his realm might perchance be cured through Sikandar.

"Betake thyself to the view of the jewel-house, O son of a zebra," drolled the Amir.

The entire length and breadth of the palace was hollowed

out, in which reposed the jewels for the private use of the Amir. To this Sikandar bent his steps.

In a great vaulted chamber at the mouth of the treasure-house lay the hidden door of the treasury.

Under a glass cover a heap of diamonds flashed their brilliance. On the top shelves there were the larger stones, each coruscating from every facet. A single gem from it would have made Sikandar independent for life, even richer than the wealthy merchant of Kabul.

Below, on other shelves, there were more diamonds, carelessly, or seemingly so, cast into heaps. The Amir did not count his lesser stones. He had them put on the scales by the shovelful and weighed.

Above other cases, more lights twinkled from their golden sockets. There, glaring redly, were rubies—by the hundred; there, twinkling devilishly, were emeralds, also by the hundred; there were piles of gleaming amethysts; there were glittering sapphires; away, farther into the vaults, opals, all in confounding, staggering profusion. And the strings of pearls——!!

Away, in other vaults, were gold thrones, gold bars of bullion by the ton.

Farther in this underground, veritable Aladdin's cave as Sikandar walked he saw a striking throne garnished with rubies and encrusted with gold. There were also the ceremonial dresses of the rulers, covering a period of many generations, magnificently embroidered silken robes, plentifully bedecked with emeralds and rubies.

Then, in countless array, there were daggers, belts and even shoes—any of which represented a fortune.

At least twice did Sikandar wish to tuck a rope of pearls under his garments, and twice he did fling them back on to their heap. "Akh!" he said, "these are cold and lifeless: not like a horse that one can gallop away and spur his steed, blinding his pursuers by the dusty clouds of his charger. What gallantry is there in possessing cold and unmoving things, aye slower even than the stone of the hills, and as dead?"

Yet it passed his time, and this is what the Amir wished,

for faintly did he hear through the bars of the jewel-house the chant of the Mullah calling the faithful to their evening worship.

Then it was, too, that Sikandar fell on his face and prayed, for thieving did not rob him of his devotion to prayer.

After a sumptuous dinner, the Amir summoned him. He held a map in the light of a golden lamp.

"See thee this map?" asked the Amir. "See well this map, for I have chosen thee for my very secret mission."

Sikandar gave his profuse thanks for this royal confidence.

"I have chosen thee," continued the Amir, "because thou art gallant and brave, and for other traits in thy character as well, because thou hast an unique name in my realm."

Now in this mission Sikandar was to act with that hardiness which only a dare-devil can perform. He was not required to resort to any of his prowess as a horse-thief; it was the reputation of Sikandar that was of value to the Amir.

Sikandar saw the map. He noted the mark where the Amir indicated Gul Khan, the recalcitrant chief's army: near it was another mark denoting the Amir's loyal troops.

"A letter of mine, telling my Commander-in-Chief of my route to the camp, I shall give thee," confided the Amir. "Take this to Mirbashi, the General that commands my troops; and take it with all possible despatch."

"So that the Mirbashi should attack Gul Khan from this side, and an army under my royal master, the Amir himself, from the other side; taking the rebel's men in the middle, smite him from both directions," boldly spoke the King's trustworthy Sikandar.

"Aye, aye! thou understanding jackass," said the Amir fondly to the horse-thief.

"And I entrust thee with this mission, for few if any in the realm can do this for me; me, the Amir of Ferghana!"

"Tie this letter next to thy skin," reminded the Amir, "for in it are imprisoned the secrets of the army."

The best horse from the royal stables was given to him;

a purse of gold, heavier by far than the merchant of Kabul's was to help him pay his way.

Presently, the greying gloom of the winter night swallowed the horse-thief, as he cantered out of the palace in a regal style.

On the uplands of the Ferghana hills snow had fallen. The chill moon was endeavouring to climb over the distant crags when he reached the outskirts of the nearby village of Sultanabad.

Even during the fiercest sweep of wintry snow and wind the wayside tea-booth of Rahim Bakhsh was open. Sikandar had sat at Rahim Bakhsh's booth many a night, with his newly acquired horse tethered, and the horse-thief deep in thought as to the best method of disposing of it. A steaming hot cup of green tea, so it had often happened, had given inspiration to Sikandar's trading. But this night Sikandar's thoughts were different.

That evening, the horse-thief could scarcely pass the old haunt without saluting his friend, the more especially as he bore the King's message. As a trusty warrior of Ferghana, he would now go to exchange his greetings with the tea-booth keeper.

"Hai, O! the desire of my heart!" shouted Sikandar in the shrill tone of the hill folk.

For a few minutes Rahim Bakhsh could hardly believe his eyes. The trappings, the horse, all were unmistakably the Amir's. But it was Sikandar who rode the animal.

The tea-seller stroked his thin beard.

"Alight not, O Sikandar, for even the grass of the hill has ears. Alight not."

Sikandar sipped the steaming tea with audible relish, and then asked whether he owed Rahim Bakhsh more than his gold purse could pay.

The man's eyes dilated. This scoundrel had not only stolen the King's horse, not only had rigged himself with the best riding clothes, but had gold, more gold than his grandfather had seen. And if the Amir knew that Sikandar was his friend!

"In the name of the Holy Pir that gives shelter to no

thieves," whispered Rahim Bakhsh, "go, ride on, care not for the debt. I forgo it. Go and ride hard: for even now the Amir's men may be on thy track. I, Rahim Bakhsh, am thy friend and give noble counsel."

Sikandar, however, was not finished. "Be of brave heart, Rahim, the royal master the Amir himself gave his horse to me."

"Aha, ha!" laughed the tea merchant; "You matchless liar. And for what good action hast thou received this gift? Tell me not the whole life-story of thine, for Noah's life-time is needed to listen to thy evil deeds: and it is cold."

Sikandar spoke of his mission, of the trust with which he had been commissioned, how he roamed in the jewel-house of the Amir, how he ate off the gold plates, even sitting beside the King.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Rahim Bakhsh. "Talk not of thy debt. I am amply rewarded. Often I have paid much more than what thou owest me for a lesser joke than you tell me. Ha! Ha!" and he roared and rocked with laughter. "Sikandar, the horse-thief, in the confidence of the Amir. Ha! Ha!" he laughed again. "Go, good brother, go, ride on, before they cut your head off in front of my booth. Ride and ride hard."

Sikandar thought it futile to make people believe what they would not: but he resolved to speak nothing but the truth now, as behoved a king's messenger. So hard he rode.

The whole night did Sikandar ride, for, amongst other things, the Amir might make him governor of a province, if he discharged his mission successfully: or even make him a Safeer. The ways of the Amir were bounteous, and he would surely reward handsomely, so thought the horse-thief.

The ice-laden air of the mountain blew upon Sikandar, but he dug his heels into the sides of the royal steed again and again. A beast with wings would have flown less swiftly. Again and again did Sikandar wrap his great fur-lined coat around him, the cold seemed to chill his bone marrows, and Sikandar was reared up in the mountains.

Still Sikandar rode hard and spared neither himself nor his mount.

Towards the last bend of the great range did he espy a bonfire. Three men sat around it.

"There comes Sikandar, that great horse-dealer," shouted one.

"See in me none but Sikandar himself, who carries the King's message," blurted the man whom all knew in the trade of horse-flesh.

For a brief period, they scarce believed whether they heard aright. Then they burst out laughing. The three merchants with pack-ponies had known Sikandar of old. None of them, however, made an offer for this horse. Its prancing attitude, its trappings were unmistakable. None would like to forfeit his head for buying the Amir's horse, even though it was a night's hard ride from the capital where the ruler held his court.

And so said they to the man that had sold them many fine horses before. They would have liked to have bought this one more than any other; but this time they dared not.

"Your brains are eaten up with cold air," said Sikandar to these gentlemen who had always bought and sold horses without asking too many questions: "I cannot, will not sell this horse. It is the Amir's gift to me."

They all laughed uproariously.

"Hear ye this Sikandar!" he nudged his companion. "Hear ye him, the fattest lie of his life."

"The Amir's gift!! Oh, oh, oh!" they laughed, till they could have choked with the cold mountain air gurgling in their throats.

But they offered Sikandar some repast. Cups of green tea, and with much mulberry sugar in each cup. They all warned him, as old customers, to ride hard and sell his horse out of the confines of Ferghana, perchance even outside the Khanate of Bokhara he should go to be safe enough from the law of the Amir. Even a renowned horse-thief like him should appreciate his limitations, they added.

"I take the message to the King's commander," shouted

Sikandar to these men, who could not believe when they heard the truth.

"Oh, ho, ho, ha, ha, ha," they laughed, gripping their sides; "enough, enough, thou the father of the Shaitan, who lies the biggest."

Another day's hard riding lay before Sikandar. He munched the dry toot and almonds as he rode. His horse was now showing signs of fatigue: for even a king's horse should have rest. Sikandar, however, would not allow that, either to himself or to the charger, for was he not commissioned to take the King's message to the leader of his troopers? And so hard he rode.

Up the spur of a hill, down the glen, little snatches of highland song on his lips, an occasional alighting for prayer, and yet Sikandar rode on till the light of day was paling over the crags of the Black Ranges.

Rampart climbed upon rampart as Sikandar lifted his head to the higher ridges, for the darkness was rapidly devouring the scene, and he might be close to a military camp now at any moment.

"Halt, or I shoot mine lead in thy belly," rang out a challenge. Sikandar pulled up his horse. Bearing flaring torches, two mountain warriors leaped down from boulder to boulder.

"Oh! horror of horrors!" waved they their torches. "If it is not Sikandar, the father of all the liars himself."

"And what dost thou do here, O thee, the man who was absent when the angels distributed truth to Adam?" they asked Sikandar—Sikandar, their playmate since the Mullah taught them in the village square twenty years ago.

"I, Sikandar Khan, the gallant warrior, am now the King's messenger," said the horse-thief, thumping himself over his chest.

The soldiers roared with laughter.

"O! thou the father of Shaitan himself!"

Hand in hand the three marched up the camp.

"Who approaches?" challenged the sentry.

"Hold in peace!" shouted one of his comrades. "Here

is Ahmed and I, and who else would you think but Sikandar," he laughed.

"O ho, Sikandar," joined the guard. "Sikandar who pulled the tail of Shaitan himself, that prince of liars?"

Nearly half of the camp was now around Sikandar, for who did not know the horse-thief and his laughter-making lies that touched the seven skies?

"Listen, brothers in arms, listen to this king of prevaricators," shouted their sergeant-major, "listen to the new priceless lie. Sikandar says that he carries messages from the Amir to his commander and has the King's horse with its regal trappings."

"Ha! Ha!" they laughed, till the glen was filled with their laughter. "Ho, ho, ho," rocked the camp with the new-born joke of Sikandar. "But come, have a warming," they invited him; and green tea and palao they gave him, and sang the song of old Ferghana revels

A thought leaped in the mind of Sikandar upon hearing the songs. Was he dreaming? Was he in the right camp? And they laughed again as they saw him recline against the tent pole in reflection. He was making another lie, they thought; but there could be no greater joke than what he had told them, for they had seen the rough and tumble of life with Sikandar many a time before.

Like lightning the truth came to Sikandar. The Amir had duped him. He had deliberately sent him to the wrong camp so that the rebels would get the King's message and be put off the scent. If he were killed in the rebel camp, what mattered it to the Amir? A liar less in the world.

But Sikandar had learned to protect his skin, and would repay the Amir in his own base coins. So he said nothing to the troopers. Many a long day it was since they had had a sing-song; for many dreary weeks they had not laughed. Tonight they were provided with it; why deprive them of their enjoyment? Also, thuswise Sikandar's purpose would be served.

He would now deliver the message of the King to the Commander, even though the Amir did not intend it to be delivered. The horse-thief stole to where his mount was

tied. It was gone. So there were greater horse-thieves than him in the rebel camp. He had to look to his laurels. He sought an equally good horse to ride fast and furiously to the opposing camp, for deliver he must that message of the Amir to the loyal commander; thus he would have his revenge that very night.

Nearby him was a line of miserable hacks. All troopers' nags, ill-fed and over-worked. None of them could carry him twenty miles over to the other ridge. He must get an officer's horse.

To the inner camp of the officers he made his way as quietly as he could. In and out of the line he moved, like a panther after his prey. Better and yet better horses did he see; but not so far one which his expert eye would fancy sufficiently.

Beside a somewhat pretentious tent, two magnificent chestnut horses swished their tails. A man like a groom was stroking them. Sikandar hid behind the canvas wall of the tent. Inch by inch he moved like a lizard behind a fly. He could not but admire the utmost love of the man for his horses who groomed them at such an hour of the night. Maybe that he, too, was a horse-thief. But why should a trooper steal a horse when many money-lenders could be robbed in Ferghana?

Sikandar crouched; he now stretched himself over the hay, now crawled upon his belly—every inch brought him nearer and nearer the horses of his choice.

For a brief moment he thought how to get rid of the groom. The man continued to attend to his horses. Sikandar could not wait. Time was precious. Climbing the pole of the tent, he jumped and fell upon the shoulders of the groom like a monkey leaping from a swaying branch.

The sudden impact staggered the man. In a trice Sikandar had felled the man, and throwing the horse's coat over him, he bound him up: over it all, he pulled down a sack, leaving the man's legs free.

"Lie still or I open thy stomach with this knife," whispered Sikandar, the point of his blade sufficiently

proving in the flesh of his captive what he meant. The man lay still as commanded.

Now even in a war camp where the troopers were his friends Sikandar dared not take risks. This groom might raise an alarm before he had gone far enough to be captured. No, he would take the groom with him. He placed the man on a horse, gave the reins in his hand, jumped on the other and cantered softly down the mossy slope. None challenged him. They were all at the sing-song.

"Ride hard," hoarsely spoke Sikandar to the man, "or you die." Again he jogged the groom. Revenge for the Amir burning in his heart, he rode towards the loyal camp. Even before daybreak he would deliver the message to the Commander. Let the Amir be the cause of his own undoing, he thought. All that hard riding, all that starving all in vain, this Amir should learn a lesson not to trifle with warriors like Sikandar Khan of the Ferghana hills.

"Ride hard, ride hard," he jerked his captive's reins. A third jag persuaded the man to obey Sikandar, for the horse-thief had a hatred in his heart for the ruler of Ferghana.

Full gallop they rode. Neck to neck, up and down, and then up the spurs. The silver light of the dawn was breaking and Sikandar hurried for all he was worth.

Then an astonishing thing happened. A batch of riders emerged from the folds of the hills: another followed. Flashing swords fell and rose, a battle royal raged, and yells and shouts came nearer and nearer.

Sikandar slowed his mount. He took a good look at what was a real battle. Who fought whom, he asked himself. Then he led his captive behind him for a few more yards. The sound of the clashing of arms was drawing nearer and nearer.

Anon they raced to the ridge where the blindfolded groom and Sikandar sheltered. Should he join in the fray, thought the horse-thief, or was it a private fight?

"No," he said to himself, "my first impulse is to pay back the Amir for his treachery!"

In less time than it takes to relate some horse-riders

galloped towards him, and lo! the Amir himself as their leader.

The ruler's face was purple with rage.

"Thy lying and pleasantry saved thy head once!" he spat at Sikandar. "But now what can save thee?" Why did he not have the despatches given or passed to the rebel chief as he intended, asked the Amir?

"But what do I know of that ruse, my master?" replied the horse-thief, curbing what was in his mind: "I was on my way to thy commander."

"Thou wert, wert thou?" snarled the Amir; "but that was not according to my plans. I wanted those messages to be delivered to the rebels; that is why I directed thee to the wrong camp. But enough of thy lying. Thy life is ended. Drag him down!" commanded the enraged Amir.

Sikandar smiled as desperadoes smile on their death-bed.

"And thou smilest," jeered the Amir, "maybe to thy wedded wife wrapped in yonder sack, riding on that other chestnut horse."

"Who is that?" curled the Amir's lip cruelly.

"It is a present for thee," spoke Sikandar, knowing full well that that might be his last jest.

When the sack was removed from the man whom Sikandar had captured, none could believe their eyes.

"I make thee presents of 5000 pieces of gold mohars, O Sikandar!" said the Amir; "and much land of mulberry avenues, for thou hast done what my entire army could not do these many moons, for it is the Chief of the rebels himself that thou hast brought me as a present so securely tied in a sack."

And Sikandar laughed a laugh this time that did please him.

The Uncanny Sheikh

The King of Egypt was fond of religious discussion; but overmuch talking had made him somewhat of a freethinker. One day he invited all the doctors of the religious law to the palace. There a dispute arose about the occult powers of a certain holy man whose disciples alleged that he could transport himself in the twinkling of an eye from Cairo to Baghdad, from Iraq to Persia, from Persia to Istamboul and back again to Egypt. The Sultan of Egypt sharply questioned such a thought.

But although he did not believe in those powers of Sheikh Shabaddin, he nevertheless held that holy man in great reverence.

The doctor, having heard of the monarch's disbelief, went to his royal master's palace in the midst of all the heat of the day.

The sultan, informed of the doctor's arrival at court, went to him, carried him into a stately chamber, where, after having made him sit down, he spoke to him in this manner: "You need not have given yourself the trouble of coming hither: it had been enough to have sent one of your servants, for we should willingly have granted him anything he had asked us in your name." "Sir," answered the doctor, "I am come on purpose to have a moment's conversation with Your Majesty." The sultan, who knew the Sheikh was famed for behaving himself haughtily in the presence of princes, showed him many civilities, and made him abundance of compliments.

The room they were in had four windows, on each side one: the doctor desired the king to order one of them to be shut. This being done, they continued for some time their conversation. After which the doctor made one of the windows, which had the prospect of a mountain called Kzeldaghi, that is to say, the Red Mountain, be opened, and then did the king look out. The sultan put his head to the window, and saw on the mountain, and in the plain, a body of horse, more in number than the stars of heaven, armed with bucklers and coats of mail, with their swords

drawn, advancing full speed towards the palace. At this sight, the prince changed colour, and in great dismay cried out, "O heaven! what dreadful army is this that is coming to attack my palace?"

"Be not afraid, sir," said the doctor, "there is nothing in it." In saying this he shut the window himself, and opened it again the same moment; the king looked out, but saw not one single person on the mountain or in the plain.

Another of the windows had the prospect of the city, and the doctor made that be opened. The sultan saw the city of Cairo all on fire, and the flames ascended even to the middle region of the air. "What dreadful burning is that?" exclaimed the king. "See there my city, my fine city of Cairo, reduced to ashes."

"Be not afraid, sir," said the Sheikh, "there is nothing in it." At the same time he shut the window; and when he had opened it again, the king saw no more the flames he had seen before.

The doctor made the third window be opened out of which the sultan perceived the Nile overflowing its banks, and its waves rolling with fury to drown his palace. Now, though the king, after having seen the army and the flames disappear, had no reason to be terrified at this new prodigy, yet he could not help being dismayed at it. "Alas!" cried he once more, "all is lost; we are now undone indeed! This dreadful inundation will bear away my palace, and drown me and all my people."

"Be not afraid, sir," said the doctor, "there is nothing in it." And, indeed, the Sheikh had no sooner shut and opened the window again, than the Nile appeared pursuing its course within its banks, as usual.

He then made them open the fourth window, that looked on a parched barren desert. The other wonders had not more terrified the king than this delighted him. His eyes, that were accustomed to see nothing at this window but a barren waste, were agreeably surprised to behold vineyards and gardens, hung with the most delicious fruits in the universe, rivulets that gently murmured as they glided,

and, whose banks, that were adorned with roses, basils, balms, narcissi, and hyacinths, at once presented a pleasing object to the sight, and charmed the smell with a variety of fragrant odours. Among these flowers were hopping up and down an infinite number of turtles and nightingales, some of which were already fallen in a trance with over-straining their little throats, while the others made the air resound with their sweet and mournful songs. The king was so charmed with all the wonders which now offered themselves to his sight, that he believed he beheld the garden of Eram. "What a change is this!" cried he in the excess of his admiration: "O the beautiful garden! the charming abode!"

"Be not so transported, sir," said the Sheikh, "there is nothing in it." At these words the doctor shut the window, and then opened it again; and the sultan, instead of seeing these delightful phantoms, saw nothing but the desert.

"Sir," said the Sheikh, "I have shown you a great many wonders, but all this is nothing in comparison of the astonishing prodigy of which I will make Your Majesty a witness. Give your commands for a tub full of water to be brought hither." The king ordered it to be done; and when the tub was brought into the chamber, the doctor said to the sultan, "Be pleased to suffer yourself to be stripped stark naked, and let a towel be girt about your loins." The king consented to have all his clothes taken off; and when the towel was girt about him, "Sir," said the Sheikh, "be pleased just to plunge your head into the water, and draw it out again."

The king plunged his head into the tub, and in an instant found himself at the foot of a mountain on the sea-shore. This unheard-of prodigy astonished him more than the others. "Ah, doctor!" cried he in a transport of rage, "perfidious doctor! that has thus cruelly deceived me! If ever I return into Egypt, from whence thou hast forced me away by thy black and detestable art, I swear I will revenge myself on thee! O mayest thou miserably perish!" He continued his imprecations against the Sheikh; but, reflecting that his menaces and complaints would avail him

nothing, he took courage, and went to some men whom he saw cutting wood on the mountain, resolved not to discover to them who he was: "for," thought he to himself, "if I tell them I am a king, they will not believe me but rather take me for an impostor or a madman."

The wood-cutters asked him who he was. "Good people," answered he, "I am a merchant, my ship bilged on a rock, and was dashed to pieces: I have had the good fortune to save myself on a plank: you see the condition I am in, which ought to excite your pity." They were concerned for his misfortune, but the poorness of their circumstances would not allow them to relieve him. However, one of them gave him an old gown, and another an old pair of shoes; and when they had put him in this condition, scarcely fit to be seen, they conducted him into their city, that was situate behind the mountain; but they were no sooner arrived there, than they all took leave of him, and, abandoning him to Providence, went away, each to his own home. The sultan was left alone; and though men take delight in seeing objects that are new to them, yet he was too much taken up with the thoughts of his adventure to give attention to anything he saw. He walked up and down the streets, not knowing what would become of him. He was already weary, and looking for a place to lie down and rest himself, stopped before the house of an old farrier, who, judging by his looks that he was fatigued, desired him to come in. The king did so, and sat himself down on a bench that was near the door. "Young man," said the old farrier, "may I ask you what profession you follow, and what has brought you hither?" The sultan gave him the same answer he had given to the woodcutters. "I met," added he, "with some good people who were cutting wood on the mountain; and, having told them my misfortunes, they were so kind as to give me this old gown, and these cobbled shoes." "I am glad," said the farrier, "that you escaped being drowned: comfort yourself for the loss of your goods: you are young, and will not perhaps be unhappy in this city, where our laws and customs are very favourable to strangers that come to settle among us.

Do not you intend to do so?" "I desire nothing better," answered the sultan, "provided I could have any prospect of retrieving my affairs." "Well then," replied the old man, "follow the advice I am about to give you. Go this moment to the public baths of the women; set yourself down at the gate, and ask each lady that comes out if she has a husband. She that shall answer you No, must be your wife, according to the custom of this country."

The sultan, being determined to follow this advice, bade farewell to the old man, and went to the gate of the baths, where he sat himself down. It was not long ere he saw coming out, a lady of ravishing beauty. Ah! how happy shall I be, thought he himself, if this lovely person be not married! Were she but mine, I could forget all my misfortunes! He stopped her and said, "Fair lady, have you a husband?" She answered, "Yes, I have." "I am sorry for it," replied the king; "you would have made a fit wife for me." The lady went her way, and soon after came out another, who was frightfully ugly. The sultan shuddered at the sight of her. "What a piece of deformity is this!" said he. "I had rather be starved to death than live with such a creature: I will let her pass without asking her if she be married, for fear I should hear she is not. Nevertheless, the old farrier bid me ask this question of every one of the ladies. In all appearance the custom is so, and I must submit to it. How do I know that she has a husband. Some unfortunate stranger, whose ill destiny has brought him hither, as mine has me, may perhaps have married her." In short, the king resolved to ask her if she was married: she answered, "Yes;" and this answer pleased him as much as that of the first lady had troubled him.

There next came out a third lady as ugly as the other. "O heavens!" said the king as soon as he saw her, "this is more horrible than the last. No matter; since I have begun, I must go through with it. If she have a husband, I must own there are men more to be pitied than myself." As she was going by him he addressed himself to her, and trembling said, "Fair lady, are you married?" "Yes, young man," answered she, without stopping. "I am

280 glad of it," replied the sultan. "I bless my stars," continued he, "that I have got free of these two women. But it is not yet time to rejoice. All the ladies are not come out of the baths; nor have I yet seen her that is destined for me. Perhaps I shall get nothing by the change."

He was expecting to see one as ugly as the other two, when the fourth appeared, who surpassed in beauty the first that he thought so charming. "What a difference!" cried he. "There is not so much disparity between day and night, as between this fair person and the two last that came out before her! Are angels and devils to be seen in the same place?" He advanced to her with a deal of eagerness. "Lovely lady," said he, "have you a husband?" She answered "No," looking on him with as much disdain as attention. Then she went away, leaving the king in a deep surprise. "What am I to think of this?" said he. "The old farrier has certainly put upon me. If, according to the laws of this country, I am to marry this lady, why did she leave me in so rude a manner? Why put she that haughty and disdainful air? She viewed me from head to foot; and I saw in her looks the marks of contempt and scorn. The truth is, she is not much in the wrong. In justice I cannot blame her. This threadbare gown, full of holes, sets not off my good mien to the best advantage, and is not proper to engage a lady's heart. I forgive her for thinking she may chance to mend herself in a husband."

While he was making reflections, a slave accosted him. "Sir," said he, "I am sent to find a stranger all in tatters; and, by your air, methinks it is you. If you please to give yourself the trouble of following me, I will lead you to a place where you are expected with great impatience." The sultan followed the slave, who led him to a great house, and showed him into an apartment very handsomely furnished, where he bid him wait a moment. The sultan stayed full two hours without seeing a soul but the slave, who ever and anon came and desired him not to be impatient.

At length, there came in four ladies very well dressed, who accompanied another that glittered all over with jewels, but was yet more resplendent by her matchless beauty.

The sultan cast his eyes upon her, and immediately knew her to be the last lady that he had seen coming out of the baths. She drew near him with a soft and smiling air. "Forgive me, sir," said she, "for having made you wait a little. I was loth to appear in my undress before my lord and master. You are in your own house; all you see here belongs to you. You are my husband: command me what you please, I am ready to obey you." "Madame," answered the sultan, "not a moment ago I complained of my destiny, and now I am the happiest of men. But, since I am your husband, why did you just now look so disdainfully upon me? I fancied you were shocked at the sight of me: and, to confess the truth, I could not blame you much." "Sir," replied the lady, "I could not do otherwise; the ladies of this city are obliged to carry themselves haughtily in public: it is the custom: but, to make amends, they are very familiar in private." "So much the better," replied the king; "they are the more agreeable. But, since I am master here," continued he, "to begin to exercise my little sovereignty, let somebody go and fetch me a tailor and a shoemaker. I am ashamed to be seen in your presence with this tattered gown and these cobbled shoes, which suit but ill with the rank I have hitherto held in the world." "I have taken care of that already," replied the lady. "I have sent a slave to a Jew who sells clothes ready made, and who will furnish you at once with all you want. Meanwhile let us refresh ourselves." In saying this, she took him by the hand, and led him into a hall, where there was a table covered with all sorts of fruits and all sweetmeats. They both sat down, and, while they were eating, the four attendant ladies, who stood behind them, sang several songs, written by the poet Baba Saoudai. They played also on several instruments; and at length their mistress took a lute, and, accompanying the music with her voice, acquitted herself so well, that the sultan was charmed with her performance.

This concert was interrupted by the arrival of the Jewish tradesman, who came into the hall with some young men, who brought bundles of clothes of different colours. They

looked on them all one after another, and made choice of a white satin vest flowered with gold, and a gown of purple cloth. The Jew furnished them with the rest of the apparel, and went his way. Then the lady admired the good mien of the king; she was very well satisfied to have such a husband; and he well pleased to have met with so beautiful a wife.

He lived seven years with this lady, by whom he had seven sons, and as many daughters. But both of them taking delight in an expensive way of life, and loving to feed high and divert themselves, they got the better of the lady's estate. They were obliged to put away their waiting ladies, and to sell their household furniture piece after piece, for subsistence. The sultan's wife seeing herself reduced to great want, said to her husband, "As long as my estate lasted, you never spared it; you lived an idle life, and enjoyed yourself. It behoves you now to think of some way or other to maintain your little family."

These words saddened the king, who went to the old farrier to ask his advice. "O my father!" said he, "I am now in a worse condition than when I first came to this city. I have a wife and fourteen children, and nothing to keep them with." "Young man," replied the aged farrier, "were you not brought up to some trade?" The sultan answered "No." The farrier put his hand into his pocket, and taking out two aqtchas, gave them to the king, bidding him go immediately and buy himself some ypes, and wait in the place where the porters plied. The king bought himself some ypes, and went to ply among them.

Scarce had he been there a moment, when a man came and asked him if he would carry a burden: "I am here for that purpose," answered the sultan. Then the man loaded him with a great sack, which the king had much ado to carry; besides, the cords wrung the skin off his shoulders. He received his hire, which consisted of one aqtcha, and carried it home. His wife, seeing he brought no more money, told him that if he earned not ten times as much every day his whole family would soon be starved to death.

The next morning the king, overwhelmed with grief,

instead of going to ply among the porters, went to the sea-side, reflecting on his miserable condition. He looked very earnestly on the place where he had unexpectedly found himself by means of the science of Sheikh Shahabuddin; and, recalling to mind that strange and fatal adventure, he could not refrain from tears. Now the ceremony of ablution being indispensable before prayers, he plunged himself into the sea; but as he raised his head out of the water, he was in the utmost astonishment to find himself again in his own palace, in the middle of the tub, and surrounded by all his officers. "Oh barbarous doctor!" cried he, perceiving the Sheikh in the same place where he had left him, "dost thou not dread that God will punish thee for having played this trick with thy sultan and thy master?" "Sir," said the Sheikh, "why is Your Majesty angry with me? You but this moment plunged your head into this water. I tell you nothing but truth: if you do not believe me, ask your officers, who are eye-witnesses of it." "Yes, sir," cried all the officers with one voice, "the doctor says true." The king would not believe them. "It is full seven years," said he "that this cursed doctor has detained me in a foreign country by the force of his enchantments. I was married. I got seven daughters, and as many sons; but it is not this I complain of so much, as of my being a porter. Ah, villainous Sheikh, couldest thou be so cruel as to make me carry ypes." "Well, sir," replied the doctor, "since you will give no credit to my words, I will convince you by my actions." In saying this he stripped himself naked, tied a towel round his loins, got into the tub, and plunged his head into the water. The sultan, who was still enraged against him, and remembered how he had sworn to punish him, if ever he returned to Egypt, took a sabre to cut off the doctor's head the moment he raised it up out of the tub, but the Sheikh, by the science called mekashefa, knew the king's intention, and by the science of algaib-an alabsar, disappeared all at once, and was transported to the city of Damascus, from whence he wrote to the Sultan of Egypt a letter in these words, "Know, O King, that you and I are both of us but poor servants of God. During the time that

you plunged your head in the water, though you drew it out again in the same moment, you made a journey of seven years; you married a wife; you underwent many hardships; you got seven daughters, and as many sons: you laboured hard for a livelihood; and yet did not believe that I could transport myself. Learn that nothing is impossible to Him who out of nothing created heaven and earth by the single word 'koun.'"

The Sultan of Egypt, after having read this letter began to believe him; nevertheless he could not appease his wrath against the Sheikh. He wrote to the King of Damascus, desiring him to seize the doctor, put him to death, and send him his head.

The King of Damascus gave in to the resentment of the Sultan of Egypt, and used all his endeavours to satisfy him. He was informed that the doctor had taken up his abode in a grotto, at a good distance from the city. He ordered his soldiers to go thither, to seize the Sheikh, and bring him before him. The soldiers went, not doubting but that they should easily execute their orders: but they were not a little surprised to find the entrance of the grotto guarded by an infinite army, all well mounted, and armed with swords and coats of mail. They returned to the king, and gave him an account of what they had seen. The sultan, enraged at this resistance, assembled all his forces, and went in person to besiege the doctor, who opposed him with an army so much superior to his that the prince retired in dismay.

Vexed at this ill-success, and resolving not to sit down by the worst of it, he sent for his viziers, and asked their advice what to do in this conjuncture. The viziers answered that, though he was a great king, he ought not to hope to vanquish a man assisted by the divine power. "But, sir," said the most ancient vizier, "if you would be master of the person of the doctor, send to tell him that you desire to make peace with him. Choose out the most beautiful slaves of your seraglio, and make him a present of them. Give them orders beforehand to endeavour to get out of the Sheikh if there be time when he has not power to work

his miracles. The king approved of this advice, and, dissembling his real design, offered to be friends with the doctor, and sent him some of his most beautiful slaves. The doctor believed that the King of Damascus was sorry for having prosecuted him without reason. He fell into the snare, and received the slaves, among whom there was one that he became desperately in love with.

As soon as this slave had discovered that the doctor had conceived a violent passion for her, she said to him, "My dear Sheikh, I am very desirous to know if there be a time when you cannot work miracles." "Fair lady," said he, "I beseech you to ask me this question no more. Let us mind nothing but how to lead a life of pleasure. It can be of no moment to you to know what you ask me." The slave pretended to be much mortified at this excuse. She counterfeited a deadly melancholy; and whenever the Sheikh offered to caress her she fell aweeping. "All these marks of love," said she, "that you give me, are false. If you love me indeed, you would hide nothing from me." In short, her importunities prevailed, and he was so weak as to tell her that, after having seen a woman, he was destitute of that power, till he had performed the ceremony of ablution.

The slave, having become mistress of his secret, acquainted the King of Damascus with it, who commanded his soldiers to repair privately one night to the doctor's grotto, and secure him the very moment that the slave should open the door to them.

It was the doctor's custom to have every night a great pot of water standing by his bedside, that he might make use of it whenever he had occasion for an ablution. The slave, as she went to bed, threw down the water, without perceiving it; insomuch, that when he would have washed himself he could not do it. The wicked slave, pretending to be officious, took the pot, and under pretext of going for water, opened the door to the soldiers, who rushed into the grotto. The doctor, perceiving the slave's treachery, took in his hands two candles that were burning in candlesticks, and turning himself swiftly round with them, pronounced

286 in the meanwhile some barbarous words which the soldiers did not understand: but, being frightened at the action, as well as at the words of the doctor, and imagining that he was going to work some miracle that would prove fatal to them, they fled out of the grotto.

The Sheikh immediately shut the door upon them, and made the ablution. Then, to revenge himself on the perfidious slave, he changed himself into her figure, and her into his. This done, he ran out of the grotto, after the soldiers. "Ah, cowards!" said he, "is it thus that you execute the orders of the king, your master? He will put you all to death, if you return to Damascus without his enemy, the doctor. What made you run away? Did you see any monsters, or even soldiers, appear to defend him? Come back, return into the cave, and fear nothing; I myself, more brave than you, will go up to him, lay hold of him, and deliver him to you with my own hands."

The soldiers stopped at this discourse, and took courage. They returned, and following the doctor, under the form of the slave, re-entered with him into the grotto, where they seized the person of the slave, believing her to be the doctor. They bound her hand and foot, without her speaking a word; for the Sheikh had deprived her of the use of speech. They brought her to the King of Damascus who caused her to be beheaded immediately. But, as soon as her head was divided from her body, the doctor, restoring to that body its first figure, let the king and all his officers see that it was the slave who was beheaded. And he, who was there under the form of the slave, retaking his natural figure, said to the King of Damascus, "O king! who, to comply with the request of the indignant Sultan of Egypt, have used your utmost endeavours to destroy me, know that you ought not to have espoused his unjust resentments, and give thanks to God that I am satisfied to limit my vengeance with the punishment of this miserable woman who betrayed me." In saying this, the Sheikh disappeared, leaving the King of Damascus, and all that were witnesses of this miraculous event, in the greatest surprise imaginable.

The Nagging Tongue

Abdullah Bin Asad, the Sultan of the Egyptians, had two sons. One day, as he was reflecting on the inconstancy of Fortune, who sports with princes as well as with other men, he resolved that his second son, Malik Nasir, should learn some trade which might stand him in stead in case of need. He put him to a famous tailor of the city of Cairo, who in a short time taught him to sew, and to cut clothes in the last perfection.

It was matter of astonishment that the emperor had taken this resolution. His precaution was regarded as a ridiculous fear. It was not believed that the son of a Sultan of Egypt could ever be reduced to work for a livelihood. However, there soon happened a revolution in the empire, which convinced those who had not approved Abdullah Bin Asad's conduct in this matter that they were very much in the wrong. The emperor died, and his eldest son, Prince Malik Ashraf, ascended the throne.

The first thing this new sultan did was to order some of his officers to go for his brother, who was still with the tailor his master, and bring him to him, to the end that by his death he might prevent all the rebellions and wars that he perhaps might excite in Egypt; but by good fortune Malik Nasir had notice of the cruel intentions of the king, his brother. He put himself in disguise, went privately out of the town, mixed himself with a company of pilgrims, and went with them to the Kiaba, that is, to the Temple of Mecca.

While the pilgrims and he were going in procession he felt something hard under his foot: he looked to see what it was, and found it to be a purse very full, but of what he could not tell. However, he took it up, put it in his pocket, without any of the pilgrims perceiving him, and continued the procession. He was uneasy to know what was in it, but thought it unfit to satisfy his curiosity before all the world; and he was waiting impatiently till the procession was over that he might retire into some private corner; but, in the meanwhile, he heard a doctor, who had in his hands two great

290 pebble-stones, with which he beat his breast in a terrible manner, cry out aloud, "Wretch that I am! I have lost my purse. All that ever I got by my labours, all the fruit of my studies, my whole estate is in it. O Mussulmen, my dear brethren, have pity on me! If any one of you have found it, let him give it me for the love of God; and by the respect due to the holy temple of Mecca, he shall have half of it; and that half shall be as lawfully his as his mother's milk."

The unfortunate doctor pronounced these words with such lively tokens of grief and despair, that all the pilgrims were concerned for him. Malik Nasir, above the rest, had so much compassion for him, that he said within himself, "I ruin this Khaja, and all his family, if I keep this purse. It is not just that, to make myself happy, I should make others miserable. Were I not a king's son, were I the meanest of men, I would not detain unjustly the goods of another."

After these reflections, he called the Khaja and showing him the purse, "Doctor," said he, "is this it you have lost?" The Khaja, transported with joy at the sight of it, laid hands hastily on it, snatched it from the prince and put it in his pocket. "Why," said the prince, "do you take it so suddenly from me? Do you think it will get away from you? or do you not intend to give me the half of what is in it, as you promised?" "Forgive me," answered the doctor, "forgive a transport which I could not master. Be pleased only to follow me, and I will be as good as my word." Saying this, he led him into his tent, where he pulled out the purse, kissed it, broke off the seal, and emptied it on a table.

Malik Nasir, who expected to see some pieces of gold was sufficiently surprised to behold a parcel of diamonds, rubies, and emeralds. "Ho, ho! doctor," cried he, "you were not in the wrong to make such a noise: what you had lost was well worth asking for." Immediately the Khaja laid all the jewels in a heap, which he divided into two parts; then dividing one of those parcels into two equal lots, and presenting them to the prince, "O young man!" said

he, "if you will take these two lots, they are yours, according to my promise; but to deal plainly with you, it will trouble me to see you carry them away. On the other hand, if you will be so generous as to be contented with one of these lots, I swear to you, I shall not be in the least concerned at your having it."

Malik Nasir, who had the soul of a great prince, answered him, "Since it is so, doctor, I desire but one of them." The Khaja, charmed with the prince's generosity, divided the heap that the prince had left into two parts, and said to him, "Take your choice likewise of one of these two parcels; I protest I give you this too without the least regret." "No," answered the prince, "I am satisfied with what I have." "O young man," replied the doctor, "you are too moderate; you must either take it, or go with me to the golden spout of the temple. I will there say a prayer to God that will be of great advantage to you." Then the prince, as if he had been inspired by heaven, returned to the Khaja the parcel he had taken, and said to him, "Since, doctor, you will be so good as to say a prayer for me in the holy Temple of Mecca, I like that better than all your jewels. I give you them again on condition that you say that prayer with all the fervour of a good Mussulman doctor."

At these words, the Khaja, being astonished at the prince's excessive generosity, led him under the golden spout, lifted up his hands to heaven without speaking, and at length bid Malik Nasir say amen. The prince said amen, and after that the doctor moved his lips for some time; and then, having twice or thrice stroked his face with his hands, he turned towards the prince and said, "Young man, I have said a prayer for you; go where you will, God will prosper your undertaking."

The prince took leave of the doctor, but had scarcely left him, when he began to say to himself, "What will now become of me? Whither shall I direct my steps? If I return to Cairo, my barbarous brother, Malik Ashraf, will take away my life. I had better go with this Khaja into his country. But I must discover my condition to nobody, lest some villain or other should assassinate me in the hopes

of a reward; for I doubt not but the new Sultan of Egypt has set a price upon my head." After having made this and some other like reflections on his present circumstances, he went once more to find out the doctor. "O Khaja," said he to him, "I am come to ask you what country you are of?" "I am of Baghdad," answered the doctor, "and my name is Abu yunus." "I should be very glad to see that famous city," replied Malik Nasir, "will you be so kind as to carry me along with you? I will take care of your camels upon the road." The doctor consented; and having no more to do at Mecca set out for Baghdad.

When they had arrived there, the prince said to the Khaja, "Doctor, I will not be an expense to you. I can make clothes as well as any man: be pleased to recommend me to some tailor of your acquaintance." The Khaja placed him with the most noted tailor of the city, who, to try his new lad, gave him cloth to cut out and make a suit of clothes. Malik Nasir, who had excited the admiration of the master-tailors of Cairo, could not fail to succeed at Baghdad. He made a suit of clothes, which his master liked so well that he showed it to all the other tailors of the city, who applauded it extremely, and confessed that, as well as for the cutting as sewing, it was a masterpiece of their art. The tailor was so well satisfied to have so expert a journeyman that he gave him twelve pence a day so that the prince had enough to live handsomely upon at Baghdad.

This was the prince's condition, when one day doctor Abu yunus, who was naturally very passionate, fell out with his wife, and, in the heat of his anger, said to her, "Be gone! once, twice, thrice, I repudiate thee." Although it is against the Islamic injunctions to utter thuswise. He had no sooner pronounced these words than he repented of it, for he loved his wife; nay, he would have kept her in his house, and lived with her as before; but the Cadi opposed it, and said, that a khulla must lie with her first, that is to say, that another man must first marry, and then repudiate her; after which the doctor might marry her again if he pleased. The Khaja, seeing himself under a necessity to submit to the laws, resolved to take Prince Malik Nasir for

his khulla. "I had best," said he to himself, "take for a khulla this young man whom I brought from Mecca to Baghdad; he is a foreigner, and an honest fellow; I can make him do what I will. He shall marry my wife tonight and tomorrow I will prevail with him to repudiate her." Having taken this resolution, he sent for the prince, shut him in a chamber with his wife, and left them together.

The lady had no sooner set her eyes on Malik Nasir but she fell in love with him, and the prince, on his side, liked her very well. They discovered their thoughts to each other, and omitted not to give one another all the proofs of mutual affection that the place and opportunity afforded them. After many reciprocal caresses, the lady showed the prince several caskets full of gold, silver, and jewels. "Do you know," said she, "that all these riches belong to me! This is the cabin, that is to say, the portion, that I brought the doctor; and which, by repudiating me, he was obliged to restore to me. If you will declare tomorrow that you will not part with me, but keep me for your lawful wife, you shall be master of all this estate, and of my person." "But, madam," said the prince, "cannot the doctor compel me to restore you to him?" "Indeed he cannot," said she, "it depends wholly on you, whether you will repudiate me or not." "Since it is so," replied Malik Nasir, "I promise you I will not part with you: you are young, beautiful and rich. I might chance to make a worse choice. When the doctor comes, you shall see how I will receive him."

Very early the next morning the doctor opened the door, and came into the chamber. The prince met him half-way the room with a smiling air, and said, "Doctor, I am infinitely obliged to you for having helped me to so charming a wife." "Young man," answered the Khaja, turn towards her, and say, 'Be gone! once, twice, thrice, I repudiate thee.'" "I should be very sorry for that," replied Malik Nasir; "it is a great crime in my country for a man to repudiate his wife. It is an ignominious action, and husbands that are so base as to be guilty of it, are reproached with it as long as they live. Since I have married

294 this lady, I will keep her." "Ah, ah! young man," said the doctor, "what means this language? You do but jest with me." "No, doctor," answered the prince, "I speak in sober sadness I find the lady to my mind; and to deal plainly with you, I am more fit for her than you, who are none of the youngest. You were as good believe and think no more of her, for it would be to no purpose." "O heaven," cried the doctor, "what a khulla have I made choice of! How subject are men to mistake in their judgments! I durst have sworn that this lad would have done whatever I would have had him. Alas! I had rather he had kept my purse, than that he should keep my wife."

The doctor threw himself at the prince's feet, and begged to have his wife again. But, whatever entreaties he made, whatever he could say, the prince was inexorable. The doctor, imagining that his wife might have a greater influence than himself over the mind of Malik Nasir, and that she desired nothing more than that the prince would repudiate her, addressed himself to her, and said, "Soul of my life! since this young man will have no regard to my prayers, employ all the eloquence of thy heavenly beauty to prevail with him to restore thee to my longing arms." "My dear doctor! my quondam husband!" answered the lady, feigning to be much afflicted, "it is in vain to expect this favour of him. It is a little obstinate chit, that will never quit his hold. Oh! how it grieves me that I shall never be your wife again!"

These words, which the credulous doctor believed she spoke from the bottom of her heart, increased his affection. He once more entreated Malik Nasir to repudiate the lady; nay, he even wept; but his tears were as much in vain as his entreaties. The prince continued firm, so that the doctor, losing every prospect of altering his resolution by fair means, went to the Cadi to complain of the khulla. The judge laughed at his complaints, declared that the lady was no longer his: that she lawfully belonged to the young tailor; and that he could not be compelled to repudiate her. The doctor fell into despair at this adventure; and

little wanted but he had run mad. He fell sick, and the best physicians in Baghdad could not recover him.

When his end drew nigh he desired to speak with the prince. "Young man," said he to him, "I forgive you for detaining my wife; I ought not to take it ill of you; it was the will of God it should be so. You remember that I prayed for you under the golden spout at Mecca." "Yes," said the prince; "and I remember, besides, that I heard not one word of all your prayer, and that I heartily said amen, though I knew not to what." "Hear then," replied the doctor, "what were the words of my prayer: 'O my God! let all my estate, and all I hold dear, become one day the lawful portion of this young man.'"

"I own," pursued the doctor, "that you are not so much obliged to me as perhaps you imagine; for I said not this prayer of my own free will; I confess, I intended to have said another: but I know not what power, what divine inspiration, compelled me, and, in spite of myself, made me pronounce those words. The prayer has been granted, as you see; for almost all the estate I possessed belonged to my wife, who gave it to you with her person. I take all that are present to witness, that I intend and will that, after my death, all the estate that shall be found to belong to me, be yours, as your own lawful possession." He caused this will to be put in writing, and signed it; and several witnesses likewise set their hands to it; and three days after the doctor died.

Malik Nasir and his wife went to live in the doctor's house and took possession of all he had. He no longer followed the trade of the tailor, but hired a good many servants, and proposed to lead a life of pleasure. He was satisfied with his circumstances, and thought himself more happy than the Sultan Malik Ashraf, his brother. He diverted himself daily with the young people of the city; but fortune, who took delight to persecute him, permitted him not to continue long in the possession of these enjoyments.

One evening, when he came home from the city where he had passed the day in jollity, he knocked at his door;

296 and coming to open it, he knocked very loud and called his domestics; but nobody answered. "Sure," said the prince, "all my people are either dead or fast asleep." In short, he knocked so long, till the door flew open. He went in, and mounted to his wife's apartment, where he was much surprised not to find her; and, to increase his astonishment, not one of his servants was in the house. He knew not what to think of it; but, returning into his wife's apartment, he found that all his gold and jewels were gone too, which made him pass the night in a very melancholy condition.

The next morning he inquired of the neighbours if any of them had observed anything extraordinary transacting in his house the day before, when he was abroad. They all answered no; and he could get no insight from them into this astonishing adventure. He did all he could to discover the meaning of it, but to no purpose. To crown his misfortune, the Cadi, imagining that Malik Nasir had perhaps killed his wife, and that he pretended to be in great affliction only to avoid being suspected of having committed that murder, caused the prince to be taken into custody, and threw him into prison; from whence, notwithstanding his innocence, he was very happy to be released at the expense of all his estate, and pronounced divorce upon his wife for her desertion.

And now, behold Prince Malik Nasir in the same condition he was in before he married Doctor Abu yunus's wife. He went again to live with his master, and began once more to follow the trade of a tailor. He was of an easy temper of mind, and soon forgot these his last misfortunes, as well as his former. One day, as he was working in his master's shop, a man, who was going by, stopped on a sudden, and, looking earnestly at him, cried out, "I am not mistaken, it is Prince Malik Nasir." The prince too looked on this fellow, and knowing him to be a tailor of Cairo, with whom he had served his apprenticeship, ran out to embrace him; but the tailor, instead of opening his arms to receive him, threw himself at his feet, and kissed the earth before him, saying: "O prince, I am not worthy of your embraces; there is too great a distance between you

and such a mean fellow as I am. Your condition is altered; and fortune that has hitherto persecuted you, will now be kind, and shed on you her highest favours. The Sultan Malik Ashraf is dead, and his death has occasioned new troubles in Egypt. Most of the nobles would have placed on the throne a prince of your family; but I raised the people against them in your behalf, and appeared at the head of my faction. 'Why,' said I to the nobles, 'must the lawful heir be excluded from the crown; Prince Malik Nasir ought to be our sovereign. You are not ignorant why he left Egypt. You know that, to save his life from the cruel policy of his brother, he was obliged to abandon his country. I saw him put himself in disguise, and join a company of pilgrims who were going to Mecca; since which I have never heard where he is, but am persuaded he is still alive. He is a good prince, and heaven, I doubt not, has preserved him. Allow me but two years to find him out, and, during that time, let the care of the government be entrusted to our wise viziers. If my search prove fruitless, you may then choose for sultan the prince you now desire to crown.' At this discourse," continued he, "which the people seconded by their suffrages, the nobles consented that I should search for you. They gave me two years to find you. One of them is already expired, since I have been looking for you from town to town at all the tailors' houses; and heaven, no doubt, guided my steps hither, since I have here the happiness to find you. Let us be gone, my prince, without delay; show yourself to your people, who long to place you on the throne of your ancestors." Malik Nasir thanked the tailor for his zeal, and promised to remember him in due time; and the very same day they set forward for Cairo.

As soon as they were arrived there, Prince Malik Nasir made himself known; and the nobles that had been the most ardent to deprive him of the throne, now showed themselves the most zealous to crown him. In short, he was proclaimed sultan, and received the compliments of his beys on his accession to the crown. One of the first things this new sultan did, was to acquit himself of his

298 obligations to the tailor. He sent for him, and said, "O my father! for I can call you by no other name, when I reflect on the services you have done me, I am not less obliged to you than to King Abdullah Bin Asad. He indeed, by giving me life, gave me likewise the right to succeed him; but my misfortunes had deprived me of that right, and but for you, I had never enjoyed it. It is but just that I should show my acknowledgments; I therefore make you my grand vizier." "Sir," answered the tailor, "I thank Your Majesty for the honour you offer me; but I most humbly beseech you to excuse me from accepting it. I was not born to be a grand vizier. That office requires qualifications of which I am not possessed. You consult only the goodness you have for me; and reflect not, that I am unfit to be a minister of state. If by misfortune the affairs of your kingdom should go otherwise than well, I should have the curses of the people, and they would blame you at the same time for having made of a good tailor an ill vizier. I am not ambitious enough to desire a high dignity, of which I am unworthy. If Your Majesty designs any favours for me let them be such as may not endanger the repose and happiness of your subjects. Be pleased to order that I may have the sole privilege of making clothes for you, and all your court. I had rather, sir, be your tailor than first minister; because every man ought to know the trade he follows." The sultan was too judicious not to see that the tailor had reason to refuse to be his vizier. He heaped many favours on him, and commanded that he only should have the quality of tailor to the court, and forbade all the other tailors of Cairo, under very severe penalties, to work for any of his courtiers.

The Sultan Malik Nasir applied himself with the utmost diligence to enforce the observance of the laws, which his brother, the King Malik Ashraf, had neglected to do. He gained the affections of all his beys and signalized each moment of his reign by some action either useful or acceptable to his subjects. One day the cadi of the city came to this young monarch. "Sir," said he, "I imprisoned three slaves that were accused of murdering a

Christian merchant. Two of them confessed the crime, and are already punished; but I know not what to do with the third; for he says he is innocent, but deserves to die. And he is a venerable man to boot. I am come to ask Your Majesty what you please to have done with him." "I will see him," answered the king, "and examine him myself. Contradictory sayings ought to be made clear. Let him be brought here immediately."

The cadi went his way, and soon returned again with the slave and the hangman. As soon as the king had cast his eyes on the accused person, he knew him to be a Khaja that had served him at Baghdad. He made as if he did not know him, and said to him, "Wretch! thou art accused of the murder of a man." "Sir," answered the slave, "I am innocent; but I deserve death." "How canst thou reconcile what thou sayest?" replied the sultan. "If thou art innocent, thou dost not deserve to die; or, if thou dost merit death, thou art not innocent." "I am innocent," persisted the Khaja, "and yet I merit death. Your Majesty will be convinced of it, if you will permit me to tell you my story." "Say on," said the king, "I will hear thee."

But the aged man laid his hands on the holy literature; and asked the king to grant him a private audience. Now, Malik Nasir knew what was in the mind of the old doctor of religion: for the accused had recognized the king of the Egyptians to be no other than a one-time tailor in Baghdad.

At the private interview the Khaja told the king how he remarried the woman after she followed him as a divorced wife of Nasir; and begged him to take her back and execute him as a murderer, for her tongue had driven him mad.

"No," said the king; "thou shalt not die, but suffer the woman to wag her tongue and nag; that is thy punishment to marry a young woman when thy locks are grey."

On the third of the day they found the Khaja's corpse floating in the Nile.

THE END

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